

Stories from the Boys of 4-C (MENS)  
Ateneo de Manila High School Class 1974



**Press Play**



**Press Pause**

Once the game begins, who knows when it will stop?



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*“Real history moves with the story of the ordinary, not with the manipulation of the brilliant.”*

-- José Patricio V. Balce



# Introduction

One day, our third year class just decided to rebrand 3-C into 3-MENS, which then became **4-MENS**. We wanted to be above and beyond the “banal,” something to distinguish ourselves. Not for anything naughty or vulgar, but as our class bard, Jo Monzon, proudly declared the words immortalised by the first century Roman poet, Juvenal, '*Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*' — *You should pray for a healthy mind in a healthy body*. Yes, a sound mind in a sound body. And a good balance of both is that which we strove for and epitomised as an emerging group of young Atenean men in the seventies (*and soon coming into their seventies*).

We did well in academics, but we likewise excelled in sports, arts and culture. The healthy combination groomed us to either become a teacher, an educator, a priest, a pastor, a lawyer, a chef, doctors and veterinarians, entrepreneurs and businessmen, corporate executives and managers, investment analysts and money managers, economists, a banker, an actuary, systems pros, a military officer, a sports commissioner, a property developer, a gentleman farmer, a brew master, a hotel owner, or a restauranteur. And not to forget, we also became good husbands, fathers and grandfathers, bachelor-uncles, and mentors. We are proud to be called "Boys of Loyola."

In a way, we bravely treading the arduous path towards the mastery of life. And surely, Divine Providence graced us with His benevolence and with good health. Remarkably, amongst all the six sections in our HS 1974 batch, our class could boast of the fewest souls called back by our Creator – only two have gone ahead of the rest after graduation, namely, Tony Reyes (whilst in college) and “groovy” Zandy Calangi (a few years ago). Sadly though, three left us behind during our teenage years – Chito Reyes and Eugene Bough (both of 1-C), then Emmanuel Banzon (3-C). Whether this is supposedly a good sign (owing to a “sound mind in a sound body”?) or a curse (aren’t we individually still work in progress?) is a good question. Perhaps only Fr. Vic, Pastor Jess and our beloved class beadle (and prophet), Jombee, could provide a sublime answer. Maybe the latter would be there with Saint Pete awaiting us at the pearly gates.

We did alright, boys. And on this occasion, we decided to share with all our 4-C (4-MENS) classmates an anthology of our journey – life stories, experiences, blunders and mistakes, lessons learned, as well as simple ruminations. This is what we could best do at our early stage of retirement, and before the insidious wrath of dementia sets in. Our goal is not to feature only the crème de la crème stories, or showcase only the best of breed, but to truly and honestly SHARE, much like brothers unconditionally share our last slice of pizza, or better yet, the last shot of whisky.

And to cut the rumbling short...we offer this minibook to the Almighty One, and for His Greater Glory. We have all been blessed, and we express our inmost gratitude with humility, service, solidarity and brotherhood.

***Mabuhay*** kayo at tayong lahat! ***Mabuhay*** ang ating mga guro! ***Mabuhay*** ang 4-C (4-MENS)! At higit sa lahat, ***Mabuhay ang Panginoon!***

# **Prologue**

## **A Parable of the Fruit Tree**

I was half asleep this morning and had a short dream.

I saw an old fruit tree in the garden, which I was told my father planted when I was born over three score years ago. The tree stood quietly but majestically near the fence with its branches stretching outwards offering its fruit to anyone passing by. Young lads were eager to climb it and pluck its sweet hanging fruit or pick those that had fallen on the ground.

My old man even hung a swing from one of its massive branches bringing delight and a welcoming shade from the scorching sun on bright, hot summer days. When we got older, the swing still stayed hanging from the tree, bringing fun to young boys, who also braved climbing the old tree to steal some of its fruits.

What made the tree also so attractive was a sweet scent it exuded at night. And, once a year, beautiful orange flowers would blossom from its twigs, similar to the Bajan flamboyant. It was always a sight to behold. Some even said that a fairy surely dwelled in the old tree.

But the old tree, for all its elegance and bounty, did not have a heart. Until, one day, I discovered etched on its bark a heart initialed SJ and PG.

The tree continued to stand, though its bark had grown dry and the markings on the heart faded by time as the seasons passed. Even the birds' nests atop the tree remained empty. But, somehow, the leaves continued to fall and sprout back, the fruits and bright orange flowers continued to bloom, and the little boys continued to climb its outstretched branches.

Then I woke up and wondered what the dream was about. Maybe, I thought, the tree is like a book of tales (a Book of Life) that we wish to leave behind, that some young boys and girls may want to read someday.

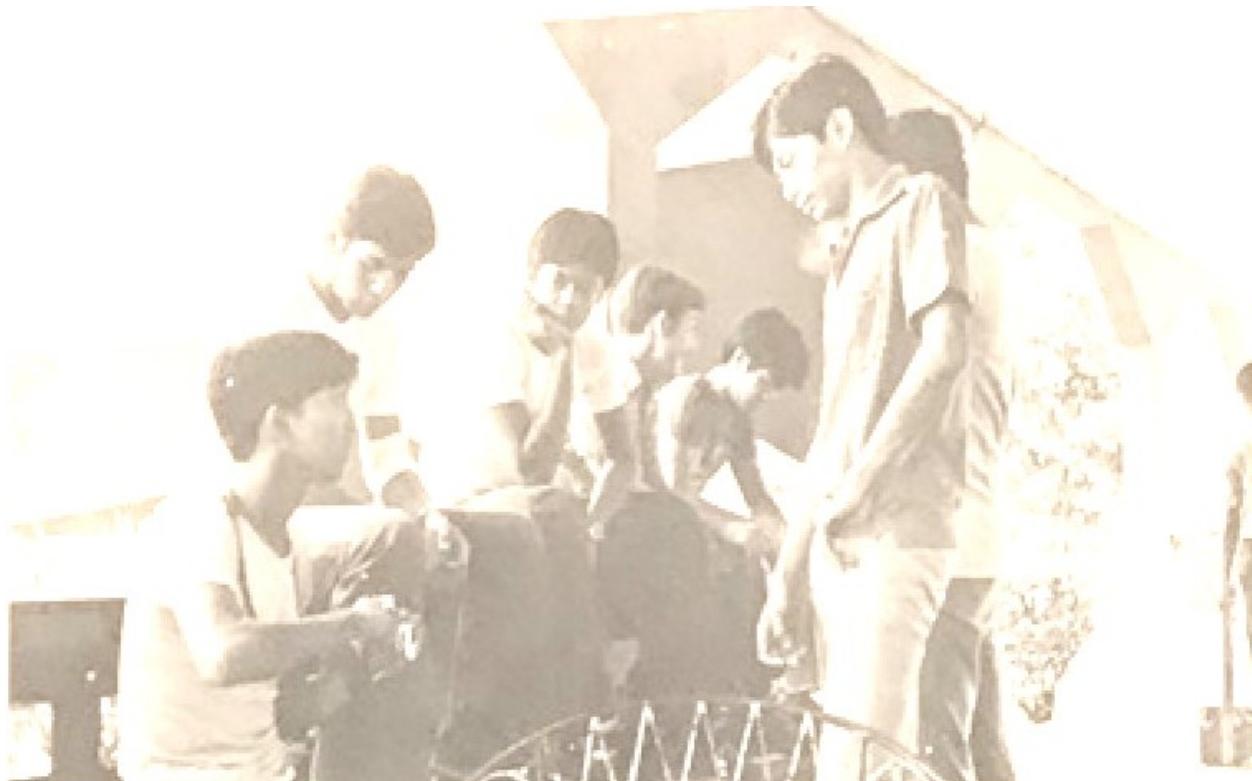
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## **Part 1**

### ***Our Days in the Ateneo***



**View Video:** [\*\*The Boys of 4C Ateneo de Manila High School Class of 1974\*\*](#)

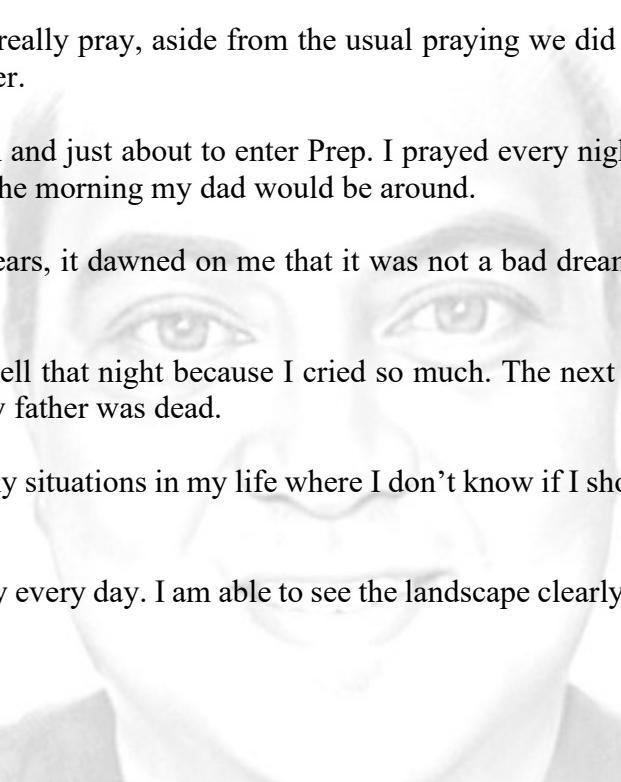
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## Chapter 1

### A Boy's Prayer

by Bok Villamor



My first time to really pray, aside from the usual praying we did in school at the Ateneo, was when I lost my father.

I was aged seven and just about to enter Prep. I prayed every night for four years straight that when I woke up in the morning my dad would be around.

But, after four years, it dawned on me that it was not a bad dream. It was reality. I asked God why.

I did not sleep well that night because I cried so much. The next morning, I felt lighter. I accepted the fact that my father was dead.

There are so many situations in my life where I don't know if I should cry and give up. So, I just pray. I calm down.

That's why I pray every day. I am able to see the landscape clearly, see that it is a new day.

## Chapter 2

### Stairway to Heaven

by Jombee Balce

I am a purebred Atenista—all the way from Prep to college. Proud am I. Although the journey began sixty years ago, my memories of the Ateneo remain sharp. I feel like I am twenty-five. For me, life is just beginning. *Kalabaw lang ang tumatanda* (only a carabao gets old).

The Ateneo was *fun*. The giant slides in Prep and the Rock Garden are two of my earliest recollections of school. The Rock Garden used to be bigger until they built the new grade school building in 1969. Thereafter, it was half the fun.

What memories have stood out in my trip back in time? To find the answers, let's go chronologically. Imagine we are climbing an old, winding staircase. Many of the steps look narrow, nondescript, and stained. Still, we have to take each step to reach the top.

In Prep, I learned my ABCs and how to count. Short pants, white socks, black leather shoes, and a crew cut. Atoy Corpus was my first best pal; he was all fun and jest. God bless his soul; may he rest in peace.

In Grade 1F, I learned to really read and write and add  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Life got more serious. I was top one in class. Then I met Jimmy Tioseco and Tommy Herlihy.

In Grade 2, they suddenly moved me to section *B*. Jimmy and Tommy stayed in their old section. I felt okay about the transfer but was bored. Enter Gatdula and the naughty boys.

In Grade 3B, we were introduced to TV lessons. They even singled me out to be the child star (model) for the Pilipino TV class. (Must have been the angelic looks.) We were the pioneers in instructional TV long before the advent of Zoom classes. In that year, there was also this *siga-siga* kid, Butch Montano. We started with *duruan* (trash talking or taunting), then ended in *suntukan* (fisticuffs). I was slowly losing my halo . . . and transitioning to “boys will be boys.”

In Grade 4B, I was under Miss Sevilla, a pretty woman. Enter Dicky Jurado, whose raging hormones were on a fast track to puberty. Gym class was introduced in the auditorium, maybe to divert raging hormones. Tumbling. Then, trampoline. I met Maling Estrella. He could do the triple somersault!

In Grade 5C, I became aware of Maryknoll. Before Maryknoll, I only knew of one girl’s school, St. Scholastica’s College (St. Scho), where my sister went. We felt like big boys. We wore long pants. We were groomed to become young men. Goodbye to pretty female teachers. Enter Mr. Plaza. Treating us like young men meant *nasisinturon*, *napapalo*. *Pag late sa bus*, *sinturon* time.

We had a field trip to Manila Zoo. We rode a boat and somehow Teddy Villanueva fell into the moat close to the elephant's quarters. Lucky for him we did not have a camera. We learned to take pictures with Butch Duque and Jimmy Avanceña. Jimmy and I used to keep company and eat lunch together at the pergola. We slid downhill from the pergola to the football field below with cardboard art pads as snowboards. At the Rock Garden, a new sign was put up that read NO JUMPING.

In Grade 6C, on our first day of school, Mr. Selorio came walking down the corridor with a projector. Wow, hi tech. Then, came his assignments and the flash cards to test our mastery of the multiplication table. Dicky Jurado preferred to turn me into Flash Balce. He told me and Patrick Ysmael (a taller kid), "*magsuntukan na lang kayo.*" I got beat up, but I managed to land a punch.

On with the fun. The Gozum twins, led the way to the Rock Garden. We didn't get caught, along with Binky Unson and Raul Nagtalon (the one with round eyes). We hung around the slide next to the pergola, exchanging stories with Philip Araneta and Rommel Santos who later became the *syota* of Leah Navarro. We had class nights with all sections present, gathered around one big bonfire. Those were fun times.

In Grade 7-Regis we became the big boys of the campus. Our first semester was held in the old building. After Christmas break, we moved to the new building. All young Ateneans must remember that we sat on those chairs first and left the first marks on the desks. And, yes, the new building came with a new swimming pool. We could not graduate unless we did one lap across the twenty-five-meter pool, per Mr. Ortega. We graduated in 1970, and my Age of Aquarius began, from boyhood to early manhood.

In first year high school, I was put in section *G*. This made me wonder. Beats me to this day why they put me in section *G* when I was so smart and bright. Our class moderator was Mr. Nicdao. Why did they give our homeroom teacher that title? I guessed he needed to moderate us, wild animals that were set loose in the Ateneo high school. It was push-ups for coming to school late or for any misdemeanor. Once, Mr. Nicdao had a heated discussion with a classmate. Our moderator drew out a toy pistol to scare the wits out of the poor guy.

In high school, we started to feel more macho. Our *barkada*, even if we came from different sections, included Atoy Corpus, Rolly Estrada, Teddy Villanueva, and Johnny Maceda. It was trendy for us to have escapades. Woodstock was in vogue. By Woodstock, we meant Antipolo.

In second year high school, still in section *G*, we had class nights again. I earned the recognition and respect of Pol Mata and Erap (aka Josep, the Prefect of Discipline). How? I reached a personal record of almost twenty-four hours of jug and post. My average was twenty hours. Of course, I tried to maintain this high standard. My circle of friends included Nato Caluag, Jerry Gueco, Rolly Estrada, Pepito, Philip, and Dingdong. We used mosquito coils to light heavy-duty firecrackers, like the Judas Belt, inside the classroom.

Something happened in our second-year-wing toilet. A teacher went inside a cubicle. Someone nasty threw a *bawang*, which exploded in the cubicle. The teacher emerged all wet from the blasted reservoir. My 2G class was not the culprit. Nobody owned up to the crime. So, each

student in that wing was fined five pesos to repair the damaged toilet seat. After that, there was a student who left a present for a teacher. Inside was perhaps a firecracker. Luckily, it failed to ignite.

I was among a handful who had a permit to smoke in the corridor. I smoked outside of the classroom with a few other guys. Whenever Pol and Josep appeared, I would find myself with five cigarettes in each hand. Weed outshone cigarettes. We were always stoned. “Wow, *pare*” was the expression of the day. At recess and lunch time, the huge classroom windows by the corridor would always be shut. The kids would be inside the classroom smoking pot. Class night was the worst. We were always stoned in Mr. Palma’s class.

The only pills I took were a mixture of Alka Seltzer and Cortal. Miss Sacramento almost flunked me in biology. My mom was so mad at me. Acid (LSD) had something to do with it, not my handwriting, which I offered as an excuse. Once, I was inspired to memorize and recite a passage from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*: “*The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath.*” We also had to literally prop up a classmate to keep him upright during the recitation. He was floating in nirvana. Clearly, it was best to get over this stage of experimentation and curiosity as early as possible.

While our minds and hearts were fed with literature, Mang Serge, one of the custodians, fed us with *turon* and *pritong lumpia* cooked using the physics lab’s Bunsen burner. Thus was our hunger quenched during recess time. Until now I still miss Mang Serge’s *turon* and *lumpia*. Each order—two pieces for only fifty centavos—was delivered to our classroom in a sandwich bag. Why go to the cafeteria?

In third year high school, I landed in section C. Section G had been dissolved. Mr. Tony “Popoy” Pineda, our class moderator, designated me as the class beadle. I was seated by the classroom entrance, in the front row next to a new face, Jess Curabo, who was nicknamed “Deng” for his gorgeous Close-Up smile. Seated behind me were two old farts—Pepito and Dingdong.

Also from 2G came Nato, Bok, and Chito Narvaza. Chito was frequently late. He often pleaded, “Jombs, *huwag mo naman ilagay na* late.” I would reply, “Chito, *huwag naman sobra; ang dami mo ng* late.” I realized that he often came from the infirmary, his knee sore and in pain. Bok and Chito were the early birds in having *syotas*. They eventually ended up marrying them. Until now, they are blissfully wedded to their original “vintage” high school *syotas*. I’m impressed! Our classroom was next to the chapel. Maybe, this proximity blessed their marriages.

As the honorable class beadle, I probably looked cool. I arranged class parties with my contacts in St. Scho. Dancing to sweet music meant only one thing—bear hugs. We made sure we smelled good with a touch of cologne behind our ears. Aramis was my brand. We practiced good hygiene. To impress the chicks, we wore those snug-fitting shirts, with sleeves rolled up and the top two buttons loose, and those foot-wide, double-knit bell bottoms. The clogs added an extra inch or two to our height.

We had a high turnover of religion teachers. We had Mr. Clemente, a Jesuit seminarian, who braved teaching a bunch of rowdy high school kids. One afternoon, as he was handing out the test papers, we all huddled around him. As he called our names aloud, from nowhere, someone

smacked him on the nape. Just a prank, *un cariño brutal*. Mr. Clemente disappeared and another religion teacher came to meet a similar fate. But there was one teacher who rocked, Jess Rivas, our physics teacher. *May pakisama siya*. Everyone liked him. His name sounded like Chivas Regal.

As class beadle, I was always the first to greet Miss Ellen Diaz, our Pilipino teacher. Every morning, I would seductively and politely smile and greet her, “*Magandang umaga po, Binibining Diaz.*” I was respectful while stoned. I sensed she did not know how to react, albeit she would politely acknowledge my greeting with a slight grin.

Being class beadle was not fun. It was tough to be a beadle. I couldn’t peep at my seatmate’s answers nor could I use cheat sheets during exams. This, however, *ahem*, helped shape my impeccable character and integrity to this very day.

In third year high school, *de coche na ako* going to school. I had a driver’s license, obtained through creative means, which enabled me to drive my dad’s old Mercedes Benz. In those days, it only cost me five pesos to fill up the gas tank.

There was a new transfer student in 3C, Francis, kin to Raul Manglapus, who just arrived from the States. I was told by the administration, “*Bantayan mo iyan, ha*; he is new here and doesn’t know anyone.” But he stayed with us for less than a semester. He had to abruptly depart again for the States when martial law was declared. For a few weeks, I noticed he often went to the restroom. Once, he said, “*Sama ka?*” I replied, “*Tignan nga natin, baka pangit yung stuff mo.*”

In fourth year high school, section C, I was still the beadle. We were the big boys of the campus once again, just like in Grade 7. Our classroom turned into a gambling den of card games during the recess and lunch periods. Even the janitors went to bet in the casino called 4C. Two were peddlers of the *dividendazo* (one for Santa Ana and the other for San Lazaro). Did Wally Belen, our class moderator, know about it? Actually, we were good boys by that time, not as wild as in second year.

We toned it down for college. We had a class retreat in Angono, Rizal. We talked about life here and beyond. Sonny Tengtio and I promised each other that whoever would go first would visit the one left behind. Forty-eight years later, I found out that Sonny J. and Francis Q. made a similar deal.

I passed the UP College Admissions Test (UPCAT) in Diliman. I wasn’t sure what to major in—anything related to business, agriculture, agricultural economics. Dingdong and I, being *barkada*, waited till the last day of registration. It was 3:00 p.m. I inquired if I could enroll in agribusiness in Diliman. The lady registrar was dumbfounded. I was sent away and told, “Go to Los Baños, not here!” I did not know that. My parents and I did several trips to Los Baños hoping to find me a dorm room in the campus. The best we could find was a house near the campus.

My parents would come and visit from Camarines Norte, while I lived in Makati. What they did not know was I had matriculated instead in the Ateneo college, using my tuition money and room and board allowance. They only found out a couple of months after when they asked, “*Kumusta sa UPLB, hijo?*” I said, “I used the money to enroll in the Ateneo.” There was a long,

quiet pause. But I used to hang out at UP during my 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. break to visit my GF (girlfriend) and old high school classmates.

College was fun, too, even more fun. We cut classes. We were more mobile. Sometimes, we came to class drunk. Lunch was at Melas and Gold Mine. During the *lanzones* season, we went to Los Baños in two cars racing along South Superhighway, *balikan* in a day. It was fun drinking with the gang.

Now, long after college, you might ask, What was my Ateneo education all about? How did Ateneo shape my life? Don't be surprised. I'll tell you, plain and simple.

I turned out all right, thanks to my Ateneo education and the Ateneo environment. My Ateneo background and story featured my transitions in life, including the people I met, my teachers, the legacy I could share, the camaraderie with the fun people, the *sira ulo* and drinking buddies. I value the fun times I had with friends during those formative years. There was support and help for each other, even in trying times (with special mention of my buddy, Jaime Fernandez).

All things considered, speaking good English was a tiny part of the mix. We grew up in school where fair is fair. As much as possible, despite our rebellious teenage indiscretions, we tried to observe the rules. And if we occasionally got away with something, we knew there would be consequences. This affected our character and our legacy. The Ateneo taught us how to live. We endured martial law, just like my family and ancestors endured the Japanese occupation, the Spanish-American War, and the Philippine Revolution. We always came out whole.

Coming out whole means knowing how to have fun. Enjoy life while you can. You don't know when you'll go. Have fun as long as it does not hurt anyone else. Enjoy what you do. But do have some fear. Don't abuse life. Believe in consequences—material, moral, or spiritual. *Nakakatakot*. How can a person be good and not be just? The first character of God is He is just, then kind and merciful. I center my life to Know Him, Love Him, and Obey Him.



## Chapter 3

### Reality in the Rear View Mirror

by Elix Santillan

The anecdotes in this article came to me in bits and pieces and are about what we experienced, what we did, and how we entertained ourselves as high school boys in the ‘70s. Those were fun years. We felt invincible. But, clearly, we were not. We were not proud of all that we did. Guilt made sure of that. We learned from our experiences. In hindsight, we also acquired wisdom.

As a newbie in high school, I was anxious and elated all at once. As we drove to the high school campus I asked myself, *Sino kaya magiging classmates ko?* (Who will my classmates be?) Will my grade school friends be my classmates? For the first few years, my mom helped me to register for the school year, writing the checks for my enrollment. *Ilan ba sa atin* (How many of us) enrolled with our parents? Did I look weird doing so?

We had classes we tried to disrupt or skip altogether. There was a year when our religion class turned out to be a free period because no religion teacher lasted in our class, even priests and nuns. To cut classes, we sneaked out towards the Jesuit Residence. Of course, we tried to evade Big Boy (Leovigildo Debulgado) and his shotgun. Later, we found out that his shotgun bullets were flashlight batteries.

We thought, wrongly, that class should be cancelled if a teacher was late by fifteen minutes. One time, a teacher was late. We locked the classroom door and closed the windows’ wooden panels. When the teacher arrived, we refused to open the door. She reported us. Post for the whole class! We had to stand still for an hour as punishment for our mischief. But the art class was fun. We enjoyed some lighthearted bantering with our art teacher. And Serge’s *lumpia* (spring rolls) shared during science class was yummy.

We created disparaging names for some of our teachers. We were cruel. We had a good laugh at their expense. One terror had a loud, shrill voice. To protest, a classmate stuck tissue paper in his ears, the tips of the tissue extending outward from his ears. Meanwhile, his posture evoked a picture of innocence. He sat still with hands clasped gently over the table.

The same classmate once changed clothes in front of a lady teacher. He took off his pants and put on his supporters and shorts. Why? The lady teacher was keeping the class even after the bell had rung. Our class was a contender in the finals of our basketball intramurals. Our classmate didn’t want to lose the game because of tardiness.

There is one thing that probably even bullets cannot stop when it comes to teenagers: interest in sex. In high school, we were all vessels of raging hormones and we sometimes engaged

in this favorite pastime—*pamboboso* (being peeping toms)! The mini skirt was the fad then. *Ilan kaya ang tinubuan ng kuliti?* (I wonder how many developed pink eyes?)

We were into what was then called BTS, or bedtime stories—naughty, printed stuff in small, black-and-white books or pamphlets. Boy, the stories really stirred up the imagination. During breaks, we even went to our classmate's house to read *Playboy* and *Hustler*. We also watched “fighting fish” (FF) or adult films on an 8-mm projector.

Sports was a good outlet for burning up the energy sparked by raging hormones. I tried out for the basketball and track-and-field teams to make something of myself. I made the track-and-field team. It taught me self-discipline and helped me get through life. I was one of the captains of the 1974 high school team. I won medals for our school. I even broke the NCAA junior record in shot-put.

Just an aside, on my way to the grade school for practice (we didn't have track facilities in high school then) I stepped on a nail. Hassle! I had to get tetanus shots. More scary than tetanus shots was disappointing our coach. Coach Dick Croghan saw me smoking and called me to his office. He told me to set a good example as I was a team captain. *Diyahe! Nakakahiya!*

I was accepted into the high school band, a reflection of my Drum-and-Bugle-Corp stint in grade school. On Fridays, the band practiced in a room in the cafeteria, while the rest of the guys did Philippine military training drills under the sun. The band had free sandwiches and drinks during practices, and got free passes with free *merienda* (snacks) during NCAA games. We even enjoyed a discount in our enrollment fee for being in the band.

Smoking in school was common. To smoke, we needed our parents' permit. But we smoked without the permit, anyway. Hahaha. One class night (this is when a particular section slept in their classroom on a Friday night, in a sort of class bonding), a classmate and I smoked in our classroom. Suddenly, Fr. Julian Pastor showed up. I threw my cigarette out the window. My classmate hid his lighted cigarette inside his fist. *Araaaay!* Some students from another class went further and grew marijuana plants near the small pool at the end of our fourth-year high school wing.

Better than a pack of cigarettes was a car. Mine was an old, 1951 black-and-white Buick special, known to most as the “Batmobile.” We were too young to get a driver's license, although we did manage to get one. The administration prohibited us from parking in the high school premises. We parked in the college campus and walked to the high school area. Problem solved.

Our misdemeanors were not limited to smoking. Some tossed toilet paper at the ceiling fan, turned it on and—voilà!—it was disco time. Our classroom was transformed into a casino during recess and lunch breaks. Even the janitors would play cards. Blackjack? Lucky Nine? We did not cheat while playing cards. But the *kodigos*, sadly, meant cheating.

Teasing came with the territory. Two classmates with prominent chins were called *baba* and *babalu* a lot. One time, we had a showing in the audio/visual room of the library. We cried out, “*Baba, baba,*” while throwing *sampaloc* (tamarind) seeds at each other and through the projector window. All of a sudden the projector stopped. The projector operator, a surprised *babalu*, rushed out and reported the teasing to Mr. Joseph Villanueva, our prefect of discipline. The whole class got post and also had to pick up trash as punishment. Once in a while, some students actually crossed the line. Christmas time meant firecrackers. Some used cigarettes to light firecrackers and time the blasts inside the classroom lockers. Kaboom! Our batch was investigated by the NBI because an explosion almost injured a teacher. That was part of our high-school reality, and definitely hard to forget.

In hindsight, these were the signs of our times (the wild ‘70s). We were wild, irresponsible, and mischievous. But these came hand-in-hand with the folly of youth. We have now aged and matured into fine gentlemen and God-fearing adults. From the wild ‘70s, we now approach the tame (and senile) seventies. Ah, the joys of being young—I can only reminisce about them now. And, pretty soon, my fading memory will fail me.



## Chapter 4

### The Beginning

by Elix Santillan

I learned to play basketball later than my peers. I was in Grade 5 when I noticed the sports magazines my classmates were bringing to school. I was not very athletic, but I was in the Tumbling Club. I was also in the Eaglets softball team in grade school. Then I joined the volleyball team. I think I did well in volleyball and I liked it.

In high school, I tried out for the varsity basketball team but was turned down. I thought I would be a good player. I could jump high and touch the basketball rim. I am five feet, ten inches tall. At that time, it was an above-average height for Pinoys.

So, I saw my failure to make the team as a challenge to better myself by joining the track-and-field team in high school.

Coach Dick Croghan saw my potential and recruited me and trained me patiently. We practiced every afternoon. Most of the time, we were only one or two or three practicing in the field. I was one of the last athletes to leave the field. I loved practicing throwing.

There was a big mango tree near the throwing circles beside the jumping pits. Every time I rested under that tree, I felt so much at peace. I could see Marikina Valley below. What a sight. It gave me a chance to see life at a different perspective. Just like meditating on God's creation.

After practice, when I got home, I lifted weights. In the morning, I jogged for about an hour. This is a picture of self-discipline. And it made me feel good. There was a purpose for all of this. To do good in athletics for the Ateneo.

This attitude helped me specially in my study habits. There were times when I would be practicing or studying and my cousins (our neighbors) and our friends would be drinking and partying and having a good time. And there I was, lifting weights or studying for an exam. Was it worth it? Yes, of course. It made me a better student and a better athlete. I won points and medals for our team year in and year out. I became one of the team captains. I even broke the NCAA junior shot-put record. And in college, I went to compete for the Quezon City team and then, eventually, even competed for the MPQCC (Manila, Pasay, Quezon, Caloocan City) track-and-field team in the Palarong Pambansa in Cagayan de Oro.

In high school, as with most everyone, I gave in to peer pressure. I thought smoking cigarettes was cool. One day, Coach Croghan caught me smoking and called me to his office. He was disappointed because I was the team captain and should be showing a good example. He was right.

My medal haul:

1970-71: HS Intramurals

Gold - Shot put

Silver - Discus

Gold - NCAA, team medal

Overall champion

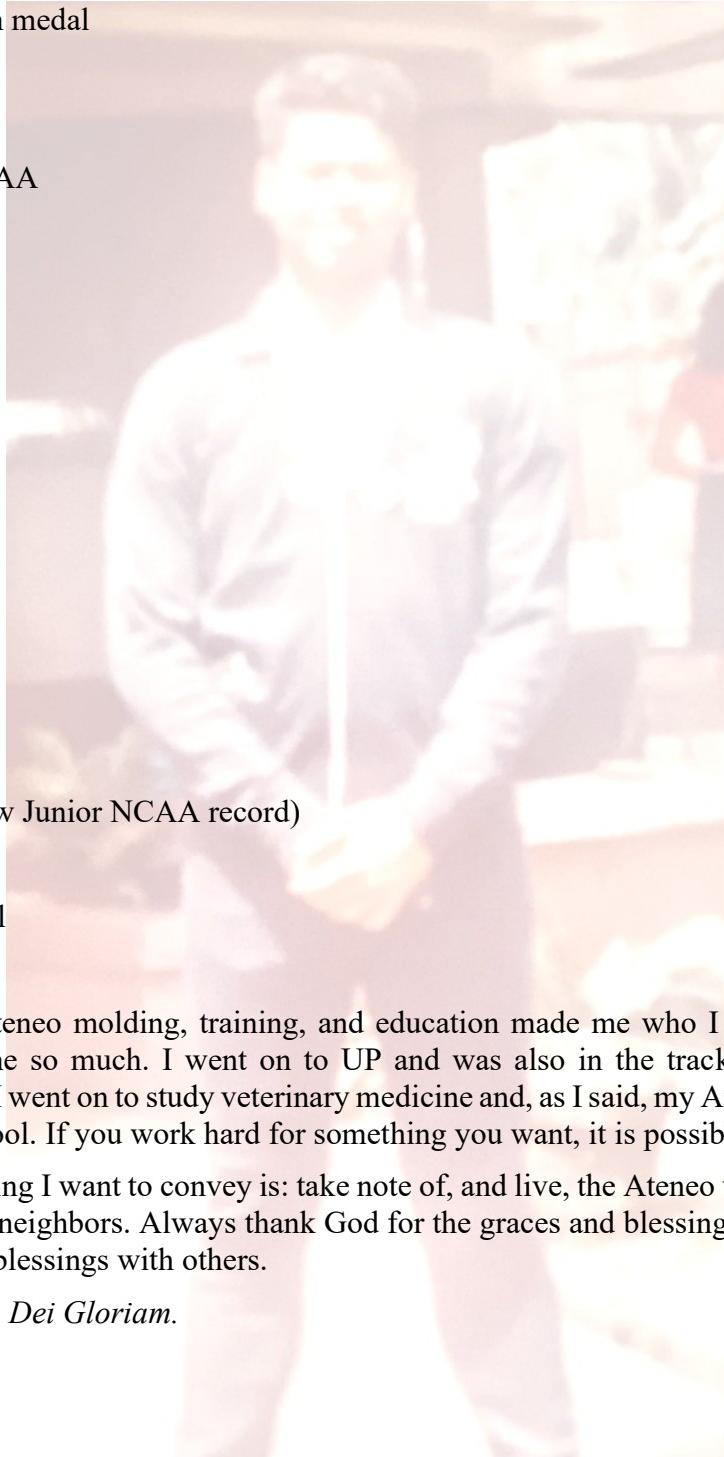
1971-1972: NCAA

Gold - Shot put

Silver - Discus

Gold - Team medal

Overall champion



1972-1973: NCAA

Gold - Shot put

Gold - Discus

Gold - Team medal

1973-1974 NCAA

Gold - Shot put (new Junior NCAA record)

Silver - Discus

Silver - Team medal

All these Ateneo molding, training, and education made me who I am today. The self-discipline helped me so much. I went on to UP and was also in the track-and-field team and weightlifting team. I went on to study veterinary medicine and, as I said, my Ateneo training helped me through vet school. If you work hard for something you want, it is possible to achieve it.

The main thing I want to convey is: take note of, and live, the Ateneo way. Always be kind and helpful to your neighbors. Always thank God for the graces and blessings you have received. Always share your blessings with others.

*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.*

## Chapter 5

### My Post

by Dennis Mercado

To study at the Ateneo is a privilege not very many can obtain. Studying there also gives students many unique experiences, such as being trained to be men for others. Hopefully.

But among the unique experiences an Ateneo high school student can have, is the post. May I remind you all what it is, in case we've pushed having this experience down the depths of our fading memories? For certain infractions, a post means you're meted out an hour or so of standing stiff-legged in front of the searing afternoon sun and in full view of the whole school.

From the beginning, I resolved that such shall never happen to me.

Fast forward two years, my so-mature classmates decided to hold a chalk fight during a break between classes. As I happened to be the beadle or honorary clean-up guy, I was responsible for ensuring the room was sparkling clean, which wasn't possible within a minute or so. In no time at all, here comes Mr. Polotan. He looks at the floor, calls me out, and immediately imposes an hour of Post. An hour!

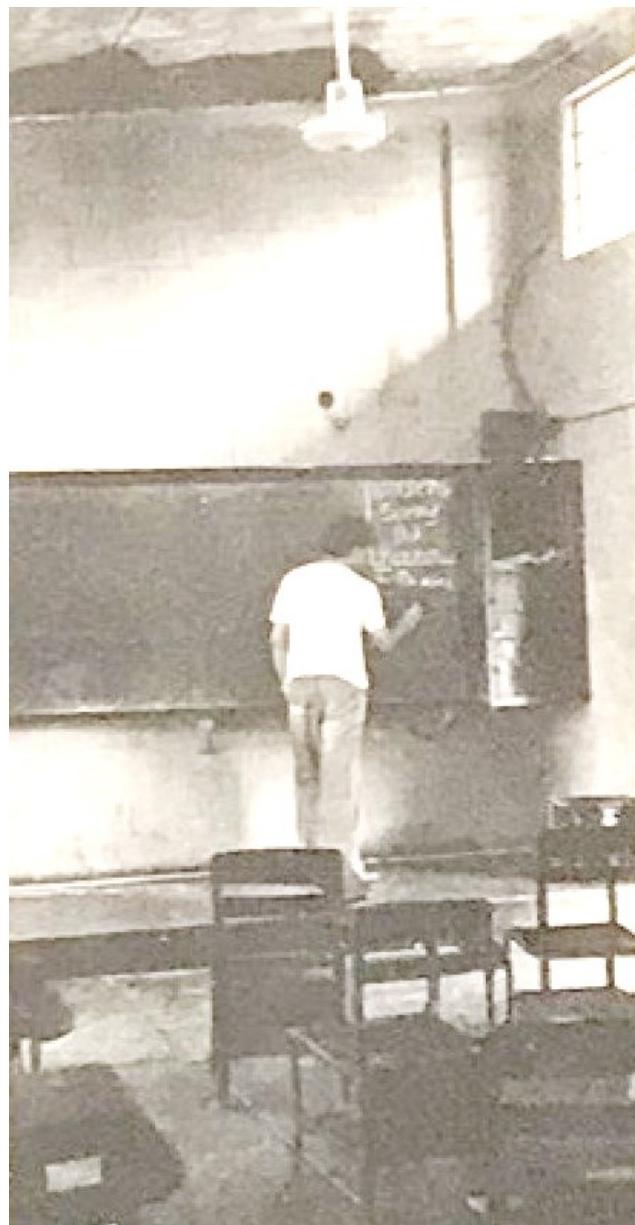
For sure, I tried to reason out with him after class, but he said, "I've already made my decision." What the heck? No appeal allowed? No reconsideration? God bless his soul, but I wondered what kind of lawyer he'd be once he passes the bar. So if I recall correctly, I enlisted the help of our dear "Popoy" Pineda, who successfully had my sentence commuted to a jug.

Jug. Writing phrases or sentences over and over. Now that's another disciplinary measure imposed upon wayward boys in many Catholic schools. I don't know where the idea of the Post came from. However, there seems to be a history of the Jug. It may have originated in Jesuit seminaries, where it appears to be commonly imposed since the 1940s, or it could be centuries before. At that time, a jug meant picking up trash, shoveling snow, and cleaning toilets with toothbrushes – an almost endless array of jobs imposed upon boys by the faculty, most of whom were priests. How it became an exercise in writing nonsense escapes me. Maybe it's a creation of the Ateneo. The origin of the word jug may have been in Latin, which might have been a subject everyone had to take then.

The Latin verb *iugo* means yoke, couple, pair, or join together. The Latin noun for yoke is *iugum*. That verb and noun evolved to putting a yoke on young, unfortunate, and rambunctious boys in Catholic schools. I can imagine being fastened to a yoke like an ox. Or it could have been an abbreviation of "Judgement Under God," as reportedly used in some other schools.

In any case, I'd rather be writing something in a classroom or under the shade than being under the sun. But as it happened, neither the future lawyer nor "Popoy" informed me about my commuted sentence.

And the following day, having been penalized for missing the Jug, I'm there standing stiff, under the blazing sun.



## Chapter 6

### Hai Skul Alaskahan

by Pepito Cabral

Of all adventures and misadventures, experiences and mis-experiences in my four years of high school the one that I vividly remember and perhaps cherish is the alaskahan. Why? Well probably because this was one ‘area’ I excelled and ranked high in our class.

Unlike grade school where one can become famous because of being ‘asintado’ in ‘jolens’, ‘magaling ang pato sa teks’ or ‘mabilis and madulas sa agawan base’, high school has refocused our interests, pastimes and pre-occupation to ‘tipar’, ‘yosi’, ‘pagandahan and pahabaan ng hokbu or buhok, getting ‘up there or down there’ and of course my forte –‘alaskahan.’

I was not that adventurous and daring in high school so I was never ‘in’ on the pastimes indicated above except for ‘ALASKAHAN’ and am very good at it. My alaskahan buddies were Dingdong (Alfonso) and Jombee (Balce). Aside from master ‘alaskadors’ we have many things in common. We were short compared to our classmates, we almost always occupy the front seats or rows nearest the classroom door either because of our height (shortest usually were assigned front seats) or family names (“A” for Dingdong, “B” for Jombee and “C” for me) if the seating assignments were alphabetical. And because of this we were always assigned as beadles. As such we enjoyed a semblance of authority as we get to report to teacher our ‘pasaway’ classmates. And I guess with the ‘powers and authority’ vested in us beadles, we always go scot free with our ‘pang-aalaska.’ The subject/s of our ‘alaska’ cannot do anything except perhaps to retaliate with an ‘alaska.’

It was during high school that such aliases or monickers were coined. These stuck throughout high school that there real nicknames were relegated to secondary roles. Thus the rise to fame of the following monickers : Tange, Erap, Alpotsu, Noo, Alain Delon, Tikyo, Caligula, Butiki, Bangaw and many more that I cannot recall. My 4C classmates surely know very well who they were. These monickers were coined mostly because of even the slightest resemblance to an actual person or character widely known, otherwise the tag will not click. If nobody buys your Alaska, then it is considered a dud. If it does not stick long enough, again it’s a dud. But if others will start calling him by that, then it is a success.

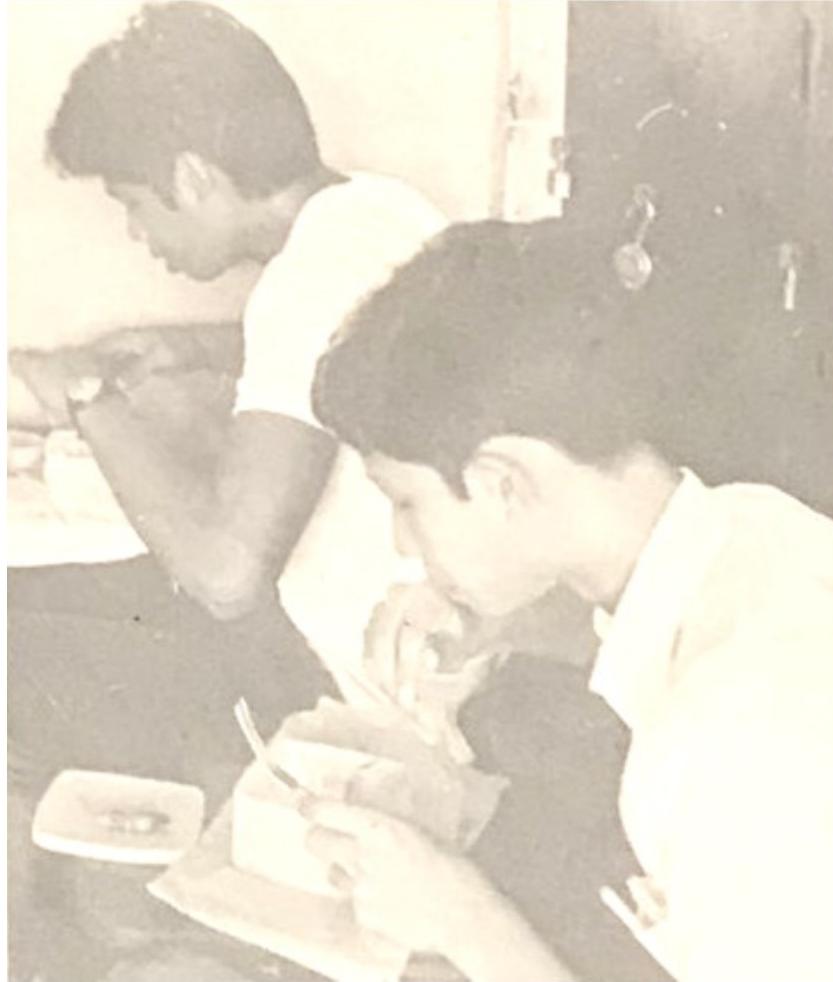
‘Hai skul alaskahan’ was a banter among classmates and friends. It was one way of passing away break times or ‘pampalipas oras’. It was one way of relaxing and forgetting even for a moment our upcoming tests and homeworks. For me it was one of the best memories of high school. It was never meant to poke fun or insult to anyone but more of trying to make everyone at ease with one another. It was meant to remove barriers of all types so we can become one and bond, build memories that will bring smiles with its recollection.

‘Hai skul alaskahan’ was not bereft of life lessons. It thought me how to handle life’s ‘pagbibiro,’ how to take it and react to it just like the quickness of mind and wit. One should always be ready to take on life’s challenges which are most often than not I term ‘mga Alaska ng buhay.’ It is

everywhere and may happen anytime and every time so be ready at all times. Many if not all of us including those mentioned above are successful and some may be even lording it in their fields. Unknowingly perhaps, hai skul alaskahan may have thought you to be tough and street smart , quick and witty and always ready to take on life. Ateneo has really provided us with a very good foundation-good education, good values, love of God and country and good classmates.

I just hope that interaction amongst Ateneo students is still there. ‘Mag alaskahan kayo at magbiruan’. Never mind if at times eh ‘magkapikunan,’ this is normal.

Interact, bond and build memories with classmates, not gadgets. High school life come by just once, make sure not to waste it.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Model Flight, Martial Law and the Jesuit Education**

by Boi Rotea

No life lessons or fancy careers paths here. Just sharing some funny events and how these three “things” (thankfully, in a way) shaped my life adventure.

I was just a regular kid in grade school with dreams of being a chemical engineer someday, but quite happy enough building model planes and ships in Arts and Hobby Craft class.

So in high school, I signed up for the Model Flight. Big surprise! No model planes here but, what the hell, I liked the PMT officer’s uniform. For those who don’t remember, the PMT uniforms were the grey bush jackets, which were replaced by the ugly fatigue ones after we graduated so didn’t get that one. Training every Saturday was a challenge, but I took it one week at a time until the year was over.

Life Lesson No. 1 : Things don’t always turn out as expected, but there is always a bright side. Tackle adversities one at a time and you’ll be over it before you know it.

I was not an exceptional student and often on the teacher’s list for the wrong reasons, but I made it to the UP Diliman Engineering course thanks to the Ateneo (Jesuit) education. I shifted interest, got into the food business, and started a catering outfit. I needed to learn more so I ended up in Switzerland. This was the land where English was not the second, or even the third, language of choice but they were the best in food. I also figured I’d get a European holiday as a bonus, so that’s thanks to lesson No. 1.

I visited the Swiss GM of one of the finer hotels here in Manila during a break. I was referred by one of my profs in school so we had an honest conversation. Life then was becoming difficult leading towards what eventually would be the People Power Revolution. He told me to reconsider staying abroad—a lot would wish to be in my shoes.

I opted to return to Switzerland. Thanks (or no thanks) to martial law. I had some time before my flight back so, following suggestions from family, I applied for a US visa. I really had no plans of going to the US, but it’s convenient and cheaper to visit from Europe. But, despite a guaranteed job here and in Switzerland, I was given a single-entry visa with only a couple of months’ validity.

Before the validity of my US visa expired, I decided to explore the US with a little more than a backpack. From NYC, my adventure brought me to the Midwest to visit family friends I had never met. They got me interested in computers, which eventually led me to staying and going back to school. To my surprise, in this “middle of nowhere,” I ran into our batch mate, Bien Bautista (bless his soul), who was visiting this same family. Through them, I also met my future wife, who was taking her masters.

After graduation, I was back in the Big Apple working for a hotel chain before moving to California to get married and start a family. Finally, in 1998, I moved back home with the family, where life has been “normal” or uneventful since.

Life has many surprises, but you have to open doors. It also helps to have the right “equipment,” and I have to thank our Jesuit education for that. I have gone to several schools and interviews abroad where the Ateneo is unknown. But they know the Jesuit education and can therefore understand your capabilities. Nothing good about martial law but like many others like me, it started an adventure.



## Chapter 8

### Iba Na ang May Pinagsamahan

by Ike Austria

As I grow older, I find myself reflecting more and more on the life I have been fortunate enough to live. Each time I do so, I am left in awe at the realization that God has blessed me with so much—an amazing family, good health, a successful career . . . The list goes on and on.

I would say that I hit the jackpot when it comes to family. I had two loving parents and was born into a big family—almost as big as the Ateneo basketball team. Having seven siblings, I was never short of company since, from the moment I was born, I automatically had seven best friends. Thanks to my hardworking parents, my siblings and I were able to attend great schools. Five of us were lucky enough to receive quality education from the great institution that is the Ateneo.

Throughout the most formative years of my life, from the first grade all the way to my university days, I was a proud Atenean. I consider myself extremely blessed to be able to say that, during my time in the Ateneo, I was able to develop numerous, meaningful friendships with my fellow classmates. In fact, most, if not all, of my fondest memories from the Ateneo consist of three main characters: myself and two other boys named Chito Narvaza and Bok Villamor. If I remember correctly, we met in Ms. Donato's first-grade class, each of us bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and ready to begin our Atenean journeys. However, if you had asked our mothers and teachers, they would probably have said that we were bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and ready to start trouble. But all joking aside, the moment I met Chito and Bok within the four walls of an Ateneo classroom, I knew I had made friends for life.

We did not know it at the time, but we had formed what would be a lifelong friendship that would see us through good times and bad, successes and failures. Through it all, my friends from the Ateneo always had my back and vice versa. In fact, I recall during our early school days—with my parents juggling busy work schedules and eight children—oftentimes, I would be left in need of a way to and from school. Without fail and without hesitation, either Chito or Bok would step up and offer me a ride. On other occasions, such as during after-school intramurals, when I would often suffer from asthma attacks, I was not bullied or ostracized; instead, I was shown concern and care. In most cases, other young boys would have probably teased me, but not my Atenean friends. These were such simple, little gestures; but at the time, they really resonated with me because they showed me that I had people who I could really count on in times of need.

Throughout high school and college, these friendships endured. As we grew from boys to men, a few things may have changed, but much about our friendship remained the same. The carpools continued. The intramural activities were replaced by basketball practices and games. While Chito played for the Ateneo men's basketball team, Bok and I, together with Bobby Tesoro and Mar Roxas, were team managers and proud “*alalays*” (aides) of legendary coach Baby Dalupan.

While girls may have come and gone, the three amigos remained—as did our knack for going after some fun and (possibly) getting into a little bit of trouble. From time to time, when we found ourselves in trouble with the occasional teacher, classmate, parent, or girlfriend, we always had each other’s backs. When necessary, we provided each other with alibis or, on the very rare occasion, back-up in a fight at a basketball game. (It was the ‘70s. Times were different.) And if someone was struggling academically, we tried our best to tutor one another. Again—little things, but still meaningful.

Fostered by the Ateneo environment, these priceless friendships shaped us into the men we would all become today. Although our time in the Ateneo may have come to an end in 1978, it did not mean the friendships we made did as well. They continued even when life led us all in different directions. For myself, life led me to New York, and, coincidentally enough, it led Chito there as well. So, there we found ourselves, two best friends (and now roommates), both only twenty-something years old and trying to make it on our own in The Big Apple. What fun and craziness may have ensued during this period in our lives, I’ll just leave it to the readers’ imagination.

After a few years, life led me back to Manila, where, with the aid of Bok, I rebuilt a life and career. Eventually, I found the woman of my dreams and, by the grace of God, somehow convinced her to marry me. Then, somewhere along the way, I found my way to New York once again, but this time, with my wife; and on Long Island we built a wonderful life. Having raised two beautiful children together, I now have the privilege of watching them create lives of their own as I enter into retirement myself.

As for my Atenean friends, our lives went on but, despite the distance and the years apart, our friendships persevered. Throughout the years, since our early school days, Chito, Bok, and I have been able to create many fun memories, including travels around the world. We truly have become integral parts of each other’s lives and families.

My time in the Ateneo gave me many things and, for that reason, the Atenean spirit still runs proudly through my veins. The Ateneo expanded my world through the knowledge it gave me. It taught me discipline and a strong work ethic, thanks especially to some tough teachers like Mr. Selorio, Mr. Limbaco, and Father Leonard. It also instilled in me a strong faith that has seen me through many hardships.

However, what I cherish most are the friendships I formed during my school days because the memories I have from the Ateneo are always enriched by the thought of those with whom I made them. And the fact that these Ateneo friendships have withstood the test of time is what makes them so special. Thanks to the invention of the cellphone and social media, Facetime and Viber, I can catch up or keep in touch with old friends, as if no time has passed, with the click of a button.

I could go on for pages recounting the many unforgettable fiascos and childish pranks my Ateneo friends and I have shared. But, for now, I feel it is best they remain classified until the day we can all sit down and reminisce and laugh about those unforgettable memories that have bound us in friendship for life. As FPJ would say, “*Iba na ang may pinagsamahan.*”

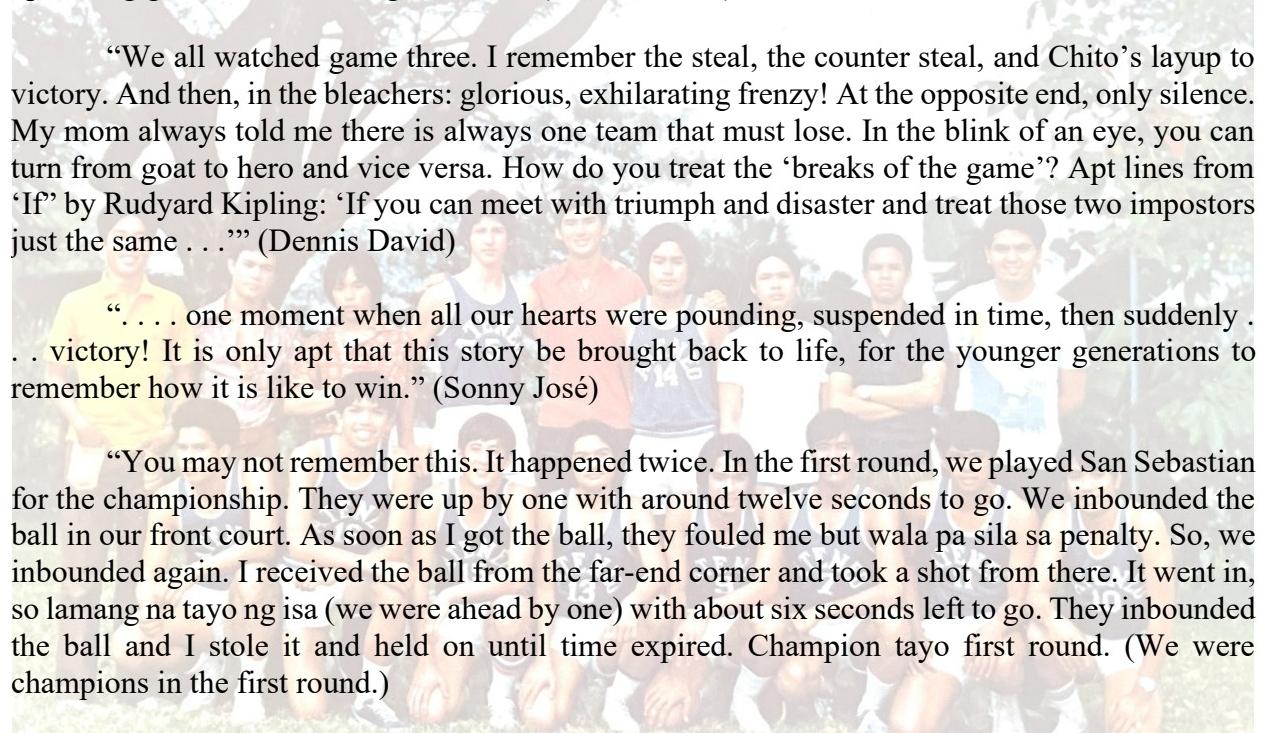
## Chapter 9

### The Last Goal: The Steal of Destiny, The Seal of Destiny

by Chito Narvaza

#### Flashback

"I was seated in the midcourt bleachers section of the Rizal Memorial Coliseum when I witnessed Chito make the interception midcourt and go all the way to convert the winning layup. I was so happy and ecstatic, whooping it up and jumping for joy, when the final buzzer sounded. [That layup] clinched the championship for the Eaglets, and it was like their gift to us for our upcoming graduation from high school." (Mon Jarencio)



"We all watched game three. I remember the steal, the counter steal, and Chito's layup to victory. And then, in the bleachers: glorious, exhilarating frenzy! At the opposite end, only silence. My mom always told me there is always one team that must lose. In the blink of an eye, you can turn from goat to hero and vice versa. How do you treat the 'breaks of the game'? Apt lines from 'If' by Rudyard Kipling: 'If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same . . .'" (Dennis David)

". . . one moment when all our hearts were pounding, suspended in time, then suddenly . . . victory! It is only apt that this story be brought back to life, for the younger generations to remember how it is like to win." (Sonny José)

"You may not remember this. It happened twice. In the first round, we played San Sebastian for the championship. They were up by one with around twelve seconds to go. We inbounded the ball in our front court. As soon as I got the ball, they fouled me but wala pa sila sa penalty. So, we inbounded again. I received the ball from the far-end corner and took a shot from there. It went in, so lamang na tayo ng isa (we were ahead by one) with about six seconds left to go. They inbounded the ball and I stole it and held on until time expired. Champion tayo first round. (We were champions in the first round.)

"Since naging second-round champion ang Baste, we had to play a two-out-of-three championship game series. We lost the first game but won the second. In the third and final game of the series, the score was tied at sixty-eight all with about twelve seconds to go. I passed the ball to Steve Watson, but the ball was tapped from behind by his defender and went out of bounds. We repeated the same play, with me inbounding. I passed the ball to Rudy Boy Vargas, who passed it back to me. I then lobbed a pass to Steve and again the ball was tapped by his defender, only this time the ball landed in the hands of Salvador of San Sebastian. Naku, sabi ko, naloko na. Dapat mag overtime nalang, huwag lang matalo. As he was passing by me, he paused to look at the clock. Nakita ko umangat 'yung ulo niya, so sinundot ko 'yung bola. Nakuha ko, dribbled once, and laid it in, unopposed. Nag champion tayo, seventy to sixty-eight." (Chito Narvaza)

## The Morning After

"I don't know if you still remember this incident. It was the morning after winning the championship.

Thanksgiving Mass in the high school chapel. I was standing by the entrance. You, Bok Villamor, Zandy Calangi, and Boyie Gancayco were clustered nearby. Underclassmen were entering the chapel. Then, a little twerp, a first-year student (who looked more like a Grade 5 student) approached your group. He started congratulating you on the miracle job the night prior. He was fascinated talking to you, like a movie fan meeting his idol, full of admiration, adulation, and awe. *Sabi niya, 'Wow, bilib talaga ako sa steal and layup mo. Ang galing mo! Para bang he met a god who descended from Olympus.* I recall you were *nasindak* and sort of embarrassed at his high praises. Your arms were folded in front of your chest and your right hand was raised, covering your lips. I was impishly laughing in the background at what I had witnessed. *Kulang na lang magpa-autograph.* Then the little boy left. And I noticed the four, big boys, all of you, were giggling. That was cool and funny. But that was a moment to relish. Imagine, *idol ka ni Totoy!*" (Sonny José)

## The Back Story

My parents made big sacrifices to send me and my siblings to the Ateneo. They also supported and guided us in all our undertakings.

It was the summer of 1973, around April. I could not practice then as my knees were always hurting. My left knee was always sore. The doctor recommended an operation. I asked how long would it take before I could play again. "Eight to ten months, *hijo* (son)," the doctor replied. I was saddened by his answer, as this meant I would miss playing in the coming season. I was looking for a way to play my last season as I was graduating from high school. It had also been seven long years since the Ateneo Eaglets savored a high-school championship. We were hungry for one.

My mom Janina, our family's miracle worker, saw my frustration. When all the traditional doctors leaned towards operating, she found a chiropractor. Mom said, "*Anak, try him. If this doesn't work, then we can have your knees operated on. Pero subukan na natin muna siya.*"

The chiropractor she found was a white-haired, eighty-year-old man, a certain Dr. Gonzalez, and his clinic was in Alta Vista. As I walked into his clinic, I was doubtful. How can this old man do better than the younger doctors? But as I promised my mom, I went through the first session despite my apprehensions. After assessing both of my knees, Dr. Gonzalez told me to come for treatment three times a week and, in one month, he promised that he would make me be able to play again, with little or no pain. With those words, and despite my apprehensions, I began to feel motivated and hopeful, so I would come in diligently, thrice weekly, with no fail. I had high hopes as I was really surprised that he had very strong hands despite his age. And after a month of excited anticipation on my part, he told me that I could start practicing shooting and performing other basketball drills. After a week of no pain, I was finally given the clearance to go and play.

I had missed half of the training period that year. I joined the team in June, well aware and worried that I would not be in shape for the tournament that would start in August. I doubled my roadwork and, when the season started, my parents and I were pleasantly surprised and pleased that I had been playing with no pain and that I had the stamina required. We were ecstatic to have won the first-round championship, but towards the end of the second round, in a game with Mapua or San Beda, the pain in both of my knees recurred. I was worried as I felt that I could not continue to play and finish the tournament because of the pain.

I informed Coach Dody Agcaoili of this, so he brought me to his doctor-friend at the orthopedic hospital for consultation. (We decided not to go back to Dr. Gonzalez since we believed that we needed a quick fix.) The doctor proposed to inject me with pain killers that would temporarily relieve the pain and allow me to play. We discussed this with my parents and they hesitantly agreed. So, we proceeded to the orthopedic hospital. There, I was asked to lie down on a bed for maternity patients, with my legs spread apart. The doctor gave me anesthesia; then, after it took effect, he injected both of my knees with the pain killers. They were thick, viscous, and painful. For three days I could not walk. My knees were so stiff, I could not bend them. But on the fourth day, they got better. They were looser, lighter, and free of pain. What a relief!

I remember that we only had two to three remaining games in the second round and, in order to clinch the outright championship, we had to win them all. Unfortunately, we succumbed to San Beda and Mapua, paving the way for San Sebastian, or Baste, to win the second round. Thus, we had to play a three-game championship series against San Sebastian, and whoever won two out of three games would become the champion.

### **The Hail Mary Team**

I always believed that there was someone watching over us, from the time my mom found the chiropractor to the time that we won the championship. Every practice and time-out would always end with the praying of the Hail Mary. During all our games, we would say the Hail Mary before entering the court. There were even times, when we were truly lost and confused, when Coach Dody would call a time-out, not to give instructions but just to pray the Hail Mary. Somehow, someway, we would always end up winning those games. Up to today, I believe that, without Mama Mary's prayer and blessings, we would not have been able to achieve what we had set out to do. Without the Hail Mary prayer, every task seemed difficult. With the Hail Mary prayer, every difficult task became achievable.

### **The Championship Series**

The San Sebastian team had not won against us during the whole season, but they were a determined and talented team. It was not a surprise then—more of a disappointment—that we had lost the first game. We desperately needed to win the second to extend the series to a third game. I remember Coach Dody telling me, "Go all out and just do whatever it takes to win this game!" Then we prayed hard to Mama Mary. With those words of encouragement and prayers, my teammates and I managed to extend the series to a winner-take-all, one-game affair, with me somehow managing to score thirty points, my best performance in that season. (Those were the

days when the running time for high school basketball games was eight minutes per quarter. There was also no three-point line then.)

### **The Championship Game**

It was a tough game with Baste playing rough and physical. Before the end of the first half, I remember faking a shot and getting an elbow to my face. For the first time in my life, I literally saw stars, but I did not want to show that I was hurt. I told myself to just stand there and wait for the pain to subside. However, when I opened my eyes, I was surprised to see my dad's face looking down at me. I also saw the ceiling of the building. All this time I thought I was still standing on the court but, in actuality, I was lying down in the coliseum's clinic. I then recalled getting hit by a nasty elbow on the side of my nose. But after telling them that I was okay, the nurse just stuck a plaster on my cut, and I ran back to the game.

As I entered the court, I saw the Ateneo side all stand up, cheering and applauding. They were so loud that I wondered what the commotion was all about. Later, I was told it was for my return to the court. However, for me, I was just happy that, when the third quarter started, I was back in the game.

### **Back to the Second Half**

While playing, I just focused on the game. Funny, but many didn't know this: I had always been deaf to the noise. The only voices I heard were those of my teammates, my coach, and our opponents. All the clapping, the cheering, or the jeering was just a buzz in my ears. I had always shut out the noise. My concentration was total. I just wanted to play, whether alone in our court or in the stadium. It didn't matter. I was able to block out any noise and just focus on what I had to do.

We had a bad third-year season, but, in the fourth year, there was redemption. We were at the cusp of winning the championship, seven long years after Chito Afable's time. We thirsted and hungered for this. I still vividly remember, when I was in Grade 7, being at the Loyola Center bleachers when the Blue Eagles captured the seniors crown courtesy of Afable, Cleofas, Arnaiz, Samson, Palou, and others. That inspired me.

### **The Steal of Destiny**

Fourth quarter. The score was tied. What was on my mind? My knees felt very tired and heavy. So, I was thinking that, with twelve seconds left, I could pass the ball to Steve Watson, and he can take a side jumper. If he missed, we could go to overtime, but we needed him to take that shot as I was feeling quite tired. I inbounded the ball and passed it to Rudy Boy Vargas, who passed it back to me. I lobbed the ball to Steve. Baste's Reyes tapped it from behind and it went out of bounds. We did the exact, same play but, this time, Baste intercepted the ball. Ten seconds left and *nasa* penalty *na* both teams. I thought, "Naloko na. Maybe we could go into overtime."

Baste's Salvador was dribbling the ball with around ten seconds left. As he dribbled in front of me, I noticed he raised his head to look at the clock. When he did this, I poked the ball,

grabbed it, dribbled it once, and laid it up. Unopposed! We were up by two points, with only three to four seconds left. I reckoned that they could not catch up. They just threw the ball to their frontcourt and then I heard the horn! We were, finally, the 1974 NCAA junior basketball champions!

How did I feel? Ecstatic! We were champions! We ran to hug each other, then rushed to Coach Dody to give him the victory ride on our shoulders, so special! We were all very happy, relieved; it was over, mission accomplished. We never even thought of becoming champions. It was always just a dream. Just do your best. Play hard, play clean, and keep fighting. Did I have a sense of pride? Not really. It was more of a sense of accomplishment. I never played for glory or recognition. I just wanted to play basketball.

### **Teamwork and Team Spirit**

We wouldn't have reached that far without the sacrifices and efforts of my teammates. Coach Dody gave us lots of confidence. He developed my skills and, with this trust, he brought out the best in me. All my teammates were just as good, skilled, and talented: Steve , Zandy, Boy, Pons Valdes, Maling Estrella, Bong Baron, Poch Estrella, Enky Encarnacion, and the rest of my teammates. They all had big, brave hearts.

I also have to thank our team managers, Mar Roxas and my two best and closest friends, Ike Austria and Bok, who at my darkest hours, were always with me, encouraging and inspiring me. The three of them had the unenviable task of taking care of the team's needs, like bringing the practice balls, providing drinks during practices and games, making sure uniforms were in order, at times even providing transportation for us. They made us feel special and appreciated.

We appreciated Coach Dody's sacrifice and dedication. He trusted us to play our best and we repaid his trust by doing just that. Coach Dody is now retired and is in his eighties. I am thankful for a coach like him. He immediately recognized that I was a scorer; he gave me the trust, developed my skills, and gave me the playing time to do my thing. The confidence and trust he gave me and my teammates manifested in the game. He did that for everybody. Basketball was simple to him. He just allowed us to play smart and have fun. And he also always reminded us to seek the blessings and guidance of Mama Mary.

As you may have guessed, the first thing we did when we got to our dressing room was, yes, to say the Hail Mary prayer! I cannot recall if the Ateneo gallery sang our Hail Mary song, but I can assure you that, during that game, the team, the Ateneo community, our families, all of us together, said countless Hail Mary prayers!

### **Thanking My Family**

My parents and siblings were my biggest inspirations. Mom and Dad had six children: four boys and two girls. I was the eldest. All four of us boys—Rayboy, Ogie, Marty, and I—played for the Ateneo; and my two sisters, Corrito and Rina, attended St. Theresa's College in Quezon City and also graduated from college at the Ateneo. They were my biggest supporters and prayer warriors!

## The Morning After (Again)

Did I feel anything the next day? *Parang wala talaga*. It was just like a regular school day. I remember the team going up the stage of the covered courts (after the mass). Then, back to our classrooms.

During those days, we had no sponsors. Our parents had to buy our basketball shoes (those Converse high-cuts). No allowances. No free trips to Hong Kong or anywhere else. The family's support—material, moral, and spiritual—was essential to the success of the team. We were so lucky and grateful to have had this.

## Life after High School

I was contemplating moving to another school, since I wanted to take architecture. However, Mr. Pinggoy Pengson, an avid alumnus supporter and the father of Joey, a former teammate, asked me what my plans were. I told him that I was thinking of taking architecture in the University of Santo Tomas (UST). It was then that I was offered a four-year college scholarship to continue playing for the Ateneo. I asked him what would happen if I got injured. He said that I would be covered by insurance and that, if I were unable to play due to an injury, the four-year scholarship would still be honored. I discussed this with my dad, then the vice rector and the dean of the College of Law at UST, and my mom to seek their advice. Both said, "*Kung ano ang gusto mo, hijo*. It is important that you pursue what you want."

What swayed me? Bok and Ike, my childhood best friends, and some of my teammates convinced me not to leave the Ateneo. The scholarship would also provide financial relief to my mom and dad, considering all of us four boys were all going to college soon.

So, my dad, Mr. Pengson, and Fr. Cipriano Unson, SJ, then athletic director of the Ateneo college discussed the scholarship. Dad was assured that their only expenses would be for my allowance and books. So, we accepted the Ateneo athletic scholarship, and I was told to go to the tryouts with Coach Baby Dalupan. Then came the thought, what if Coach Dalupan did not take me into the team?

With this in mind, I went to UST and took the entrance exam. UST became my fallback. My parents were not affluent, but we were comfortable. Dad was a lawyer and taught at the College of Law at UST then. Mom was a full-time housewife. I thought that I could also apply for a scholarship there, if I could play for their varsity basketball team. And if my other siblings decided to follow my path—as it would turn out, they all would—all with possible college scholarships, it would be a big help and relief to my parents.

I managed to make the college team at the Ateneo under, to me, the best coach in Philippine basketball, Coach Dalupan.

In college, my knees continued to hurt. My dad said to give it up, *tigil na kakalaro*. But I continued to play despite the pain, for the love of the game. In my second year, 1976 and 1977, we were back-to-back champions in the senior division. In 1978, we almost scored the first three-

peat. But we fell short, losing to San Beda by a single point in the first closed-door championship match. Why closed doors? Too many rumbles and brawls among students after games. Because of this, Fr. José Cruz, SJ , Ateneo rector then, also decided to move the Ateneo out of the NCAA and transfer to the Universities Athletic Association of the Philippines, or UAAP.

With many thanks to the Ateneo and basketball, I was able to finish college where I graduated with a degree in economics.

After college, I took a job at Ayala. I went through many interviews. My basketball and sports record were also important to them as they also took into consideration other proficiencies linked to sports, such as leadership and team-building skills. They said, “Aside from your educational training, we also consider other personal skills.”

The Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) also contacted me. Actually, there were two opportunities with them that arose, one of which was with a new team. I had not played in two years, but I still managed to play well in the tryout games. I was told that I was a shoo-in for a spot, but that I needed to attend the last tryout as a formality. Unfortunately, that day coincided with the schedule of my final exams for my first year in an MBA program. So that was the end of that.

Another PBA opportunity arose. Aware of my knee problems, another team offered to have my knees operated on and rehabilitated, with all expenses paid. At age twenty-three, I deliberated whether my knees would be able to take the rigors of the league. In the end, I decided that I did not wish to go through the painful-knees saga again. And since the remuneration then was not much different from that in my current company, other than the provision of a car for my use (which I already had), I felt that I had a better future in my professional career. It was then that I realized that my basketball-playing days had ended in college.

## Lessons Learned

Basketball formed my character.

1. ***Learn to sacrifice; have discipline and dedication.*** One has to put in the time, work at your goals diligently, and keep learning.
2. ***Know your weaknesses and strengths.*** Do not only develop only one facet of yourself. Constantly look and work for self-improvement.
3. ***Value teamwork.*** No one can be successful alone. We all need support from other people. Show your appreciation for them.
4. ***Appreciate your mentor.*** Learn from your coach, your teachers. They sacrifice so much to educate you, teach you new skills, provide you with more knowledge to make you a better person.

5. ***Be a contributor.*** Develop your abilities, your interpersonal and communication skills, your knowledge, so you may help others improve as well. Make yourself valuable to your team.
6. ***Love and respect your parents.*** Without the love and concern of our parents, we would never become the persons that we are. They provide the opportunities; we provide the effort. Be grateful to them forever.
7. ***Be humble.*** I am grateful to the school for giving me the opportunity to represent them. When I started that season, I never expected to play a significant role in winning a championship. Without the support of my teammates, the love of my parents, the wisdom of my coach, and the cheering and prayers from the Ateneo community, nothing would have come out of it. It is because of them that I have striven to become good at basketball. I am humbled by their recognition and grateful for their support.
8. ***Be thankful for God's love and guidance, as well as Mama Mary's.*** Where and what else would I be without Him and Mama Mary?

At the end of the day, one realizes that we all have limitations, and that there are people who are better than us. But life is about constant development—about improving—and every game is a learning experience. There will always be obstacles (defensive plays) preventing you from achieving your goal, but you must never give up finding ways to beat those obstacles. Remember, when in a team, one cannot win on one's efforts alone. The success of the team relies on the cooperation of everyone. With every game, a new lesson is learned.

My biggest failure and disappointment? How did basketball help me cope?

The experience of losing and recovering. Life is not smooth. It is full of bumps and failings. Not all targets are reached. There are always hurdles and disappointments. They could even be people. One has to be able to accept failures and move on. Tomorrow will be another day.

Our loss to San Beda in college deprived us of a three-peat. With Rayboy and Ogie in the same team as me, it would have been the first time in history that a team with three brothers would have won a championship, which was why I wanted so much to win. I also felt it would have been the last game of my basketball career. Up to now, I regret that loss. But that's life. You just have to pick up the pieces, learn from it, and move forward.

As Michael Jordan once said, "It takes eight times to fall, and nine times to get back. If you fail ninety-nine times, then that one success is the most important." Basketball taught me how to face many trials in life: recover and get up and never be discouraged by failures; never stop looking for answers; constantly search for solutions and improvement.

And always appreciate your experiences, good or bad. Basketball was something I just liked. I just wanted to play, and I am so grateful that even with a bad leg, I was able to achieve something. It helped shape my character. I always remember to be thankful. In victory or defeat,

in good times or bad, we should also always remember to keep the good Lord and Mama Mary in our lives. Lord, thank you. Mama Mary, thank you for your blessings.

## Epilogue

I wrote this hoping to share my experience with the younger generation, especially with my two daughters, who, for a long time, could not believe that I once played basketball, a time in my life when they were not yet around. Today, I just cannot imagine life without them. And just for that, the time spent writing this piece was worth it.

I also would like to thank my classmates for encouraging me to write this piece and for including this in their worthwhile project. It allowed me to share an experience, which was so special to me. I only hope that I have lived up to their expectations.



## Chapter 10

### In Lieu of Graduating, a Political Refugee

by Francis Xavier Manglapus

I started out as Batch '72 at Ateneo High School. But since I spent the next 3 years of High School in the United States, I ended up returning to the Ateneo Batch '73 and had to attend some back subjects like Physics and Pilipino, hence my involvement with Batch '74.

School year '72-'73 was eventful for me as it was during the time when Martial Law was declared.

My father, Senator Raul S. Manglapus was the leader of the opposition at the Constitution Convention that was in session at that time. He was one of three opposition figures that was ordered to be immediately arrested. The other two being Senator Aquino and Senator Diokno. Luckily, he was able to evade arrest as he had left for speaking engagements in California a day before.

I was not at home as it was a Friday night, so I was hanging out with my classmate, the late Rocky Crisologo. When I came home around 11pm, all the lights were on, that's when I found out that soldiers had just left looking to arrest my father. They did not believe that he had left the country, so they searched the whole house. My brothers were at home at that time with my mother and they were worried that the soldiers might plant something incriminating so they watched carefully as the soldiers made their search.

My father's initial reaction was to return home immediately. However, my mother made calls to other opposition figures and the consensus was it was best that my father had evaded arrest so he could be the voice against Martial Law abroad. What good would it do if he would just come home to prison just like the other opposition figures.

My father agreed but before planning anything abroad he had to get his family out. This was going to be difficult as there was a travel ban at that time. So, after months of trying to leave legally with our appeals to the government on humanitarian grounds falling on deaf ears, we decided to escape.

In March 1973, the escape was put in motion. I was to escape with my mother and two elder brothers. It was a complete secret, as even our helpers did not know where we were going. We could only bring one bag. But I insisted on bringing my guitar. We had fake identification cards and flew to Zamboanga. After an overnight stay we took a private plane to Sibutu, an island municipality of Tawi. It had a landing strip as some people go there to hunt for boar. After a few days in Sibutu we boarded a fishing boat, a Kumpit, for a 10-hour evening ride in dangerous waters infested with pirates. However, we were being helped by Muslim traders from the area, so we were given safe passage. Soon we landed in Tawau, a coastal city in Sabah, Malaysia.

Upon landing in Tawau the plan was to enter the city and call my father in the United States to put in motion a series of moves to get us safely to the States with proper documentation as political refugees. Unfortunately, immigration rules had changed in Tawau. Whereas before

Muslim traders could have a day pass and enter the city, they now required a visa. So, we were stuck on the Kumpit at the dock for at least 3 days. We subsisted by eating local pan de sal.

Finally, after constant pleading and appeals, the immigration guards allowed my brother and another from our group to enter just for a few hours. They immediately went to the nearest Catholic Church to tell the priest of our dilemma and called my father.

A day after, high ranking officers from the foreign service of Malaysia literally swooped down on the dock, much to the surprise of the immigration guards, to ferry us out. We were told not to say a word to anyone, and they checked us in a hotel. We were allowed to call our father to tell him we were safely out of the dock. He instructed us to just follow the Malaysian authorities as they work on the documentation.

After a few days, we were placed in a house in Kuala Lumpur for about one week. We were not allowed to go out of the house and speak to anyone, even the neighbors. Then one day a car came to fetch us for lunch, we were going to the house of the Senate President of Malaysia Ong Yoke Lin. He then apologized about all the secrecy and explained the situation and how he got involved.

After my father found out we were stuck in Tawau, he called his friend, Bill Bundy, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs under President Johnson, to ask for help. Mr. Bundy then contacted Senate President Ong who agreed to help in one condition. That it be kept completely secret.

Senate President Ong did not want President Marcos to find out that he was helping our family as the Philippine claim to Sabah was still a very hot issue at that time.

After a few more days our documents were finally complete and we flew to New York and entered under political asylum visas. Our journey took 3 weeks.

This route was later perfected and was used by other political refugees fleeing Martial Law. That's another story. We blazed the trail.

My father later set up the Movement for a Free Philippines and we ended up staying in the United States till 1986.

As Secretary of Foreign Affairs under Cory, he looked up Senate President Ong in one of his official visits to Kuala Lumpur to personally thank him.



The Kumpit



My 2 brothers and Jerry Jumat, a Muslim, who became a priest and who helped in the escape

## **Chapter 11**

### **Why Ateneo?**

by Nato Caluag

#### **Introduction**

There have been many changes from our time to the present. Our high school 70's was a simple 40/section X 6 sections X 4 grade levels. Social dynamics allowed us to know 3 years up and 3 years down (a current gauge would be, sadly, knowing those older and younger both sides by three batches, who have recently passed away because of the dreaded virus.)

My son, Hermie, was born in 1997, is GS'12, HS'16. When he finished high school, they were close to 50 students /section with 16 or 14? sections per year level. Try reflecting on the social dynamics and limitations (class nights for 50 X 14 = 700 students?). A simple question is "How many schoolmates do you know personally from other sections? from 3 batches up? 3 batches down?

Here's more. In more recent times, the high school has two more years, with the last two (senior high, going coed). There may be more students per class plus more sections/year level from our time to my son's, to the present batch 5 years after my son's batch. Just ponder on the answers to 1. "who do you know?" and 2. "Who are the Jesuits who you know personally?" What are the changes, formation wise? Kamusta na yung Atenista ngayon? Then we reflect on life in the College (comparing Arts and Sciences during our time with the added ladies rooms as the major radical change). In more recent years, expansion into the Loyola Schools setup. We've witnessed campus traffic jams, shortages in parking space. We are the only major school in Metro Manila without a Southern expansion.

#### **College**

Happy birthday to our dear, dear friend and mentor, Chita , from Mag and humbly, from me. I am sure you have given Mag and me priceless memories of our student years. We pray for your good help and happiness. What follows is a reflection I write to myself recently.

This is Nato's reflection some 2 years back, sharing with Mag and our dear Celebrant. I swear before you two that it is unedited from when I wrote it.... Roll call of my Professors par excellence and, for the privilege of being in the classes of these esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen... Chita Rosales, Sol Reyes, Doreen Fernandez, Fr. Joey Cruz S. J., Fr. R. Tanseco S.J. , Fr. E. Hontiveros S.J. , Fr. Leonard S.J. , Fr. Lahiff S.J., Fr. Joe Cruz S.J., Fr. H. De La Costa S.J., Fr. R. Ferriols S.J. Fr. Ferriols summed it all up, in reference to his Philosophy 103 and 104 classes, "Ang mga klase sa Pilosopiya ay hindi lamang pagpasok para mag-arat. Ang klase sa Pilosopiya ay karanasan."

Karagdagang pagninilay (2 Mayo 2019). Nais ko pong i-deklara na ang mga guro at mga Sugong Heswita sa Ateneo ay hindi lamang nagtuturo, pinayaman nila kami sa pagbabahagi ng kanilang sarili sa amin. Ika nga ni Padre Ferriols, ang pag-aaral sa Ateneo (at hindi lang sa Pilosopiya) ay isang karanasan...

## **High School**

Balik naman sa High School, marami din silang aming ginalang dahil sa kanilang galing at ang kanila bait at pasensiya. Alejandro, Parma, Rivas, Posio, Diaz, Cuadro, Martin, Obrien SJ, Joey Cruz SJ, Gigi Katigbak, plus the Jesuit principals we had, Miller / Butalid. Jesuits? Croghan, 2 more Americans whose names escaped from my senior memory, and Fr. Arguelles, Fr. Pastor, both Guidance Counselors.

April 26, 2021



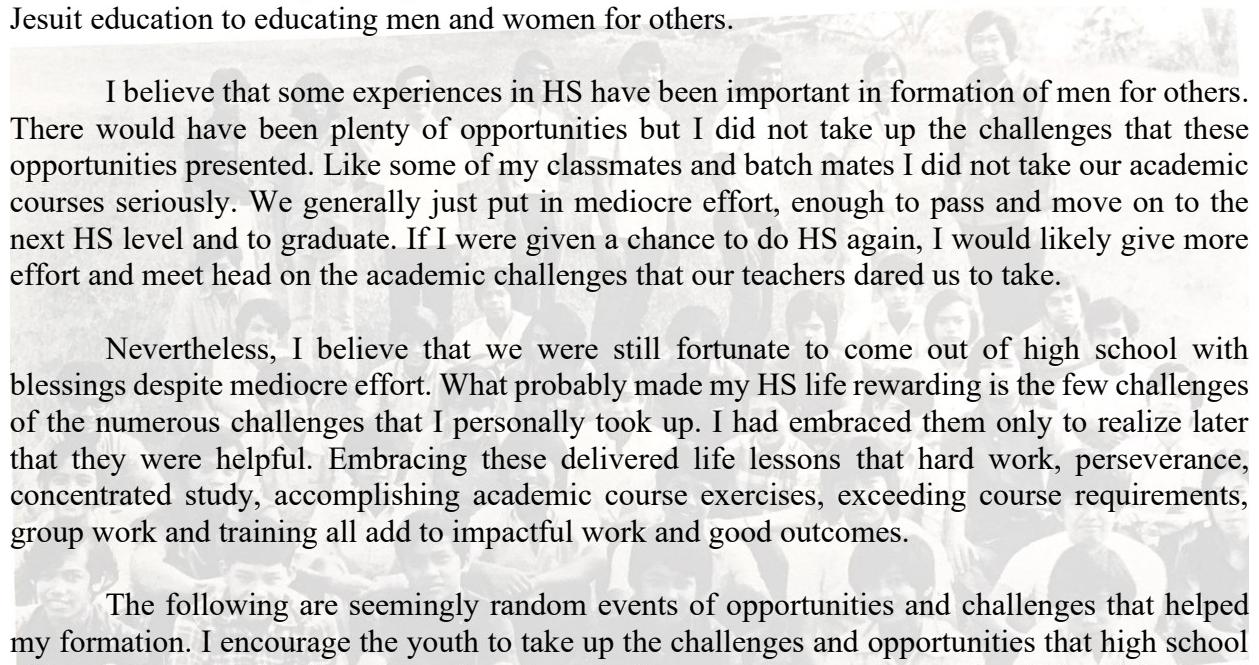
## Chapter 12

### HS4CHS74

by Joey Cuyegkeng

High School life is a period of self-discovery, self-realization and self-actualizaton. Seemingly unrelated events become defining moments that deliver installments of who you are in a life-long process of self-discovery and self-realization. I believe that these unrelated but defining events bring us to a good stage in life that may actually be the work of Divine Providence.

Our last year in High School saw a redirection of Jesuit education. Then Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe in July 1973 was not satisfied with Jesuit school graduates and refocused Jesuit education to educating men and women for others.



I believe that some experiences in HS have been important in formation of men for others. There would have been plenty of opportunities but I did not take up the challenges that these opportunities presented. Like some of my classmates and batch mates I did not take our academic courses seriously. We generally just put in mediocre effort, enough to pass and move on to the next HS level and to graduate. If I were given a chance to do HS again, I would likely give more effort and meet head on the academic challenges that our teachers dared us to take.

Nevertheless, I believe that we were still fortunate to come out of high school with blessings despite mediocre effort. What probably made my HS life rewarding is the few challenges of the numerous challenges that I personally took up. I had embraced them only to realize later that they were helpful. Embracing these delivered life lessons that hard work, perseverance, concentrated study, accomplishing academic course exercises, exceeding course requirements, group work and training all add to impactful work and good outcomes.

The following are seemingly random events of opportunities and challenges that helped my formation. I encourage the youth to take up the challenges and opportunities that high school offers and to work hard at conquering these challenges. The rewards are plentiful and lasting. I also seek forgiveness from other classmates who I fail to mention here. Nevertheless, I am grateful that we went through high school experiencing the ups and downs together while scaling new heights or plumbing the lows. Priceless camaraderie.

Here we go with the events. I am sure there are more but the following surface quickly.

Philippine Social Studies/History opened our eyes and minds intricacies of a larger world while understanding the context and culture. Our 1C class debate on an aspect of the proposed amendments to the constitution – shift to parliamentary system from presidential system. Our team defended the prevailing presidential system. The independence of the three branches of government is critical to a democracy. There are pros and cons to parliamentary and presidential systems. We argued that in the parliamentary system the executive and legislative branches operate as one with judicial branch as the only check to the executive-legislative branches. We argued that

under the presidential system, checks and balances among the three different branches of government are present. (Of course, this advantage under the presidential system assumes truly independent branches of government. Unfortunately, the political dynamics have changed with ruling executive branch co-opting the other branches of government). Our teacher then Mr. Pineda stressed our point that of importance check and balances and independence of the three branches of government. We would not have been able to argue this point had we not thoroughly read the constitution and understood the role of the three branches of government. Our team fortunately won this debate.

Our social studies teacher in 4<sup>th</sup> year was Dr. Wally Belen who introduced us also to economics, rudiments of the law of demand and supply and world business. He often had bonus questions in quizzes and long tests. I remember that he asked about the meaning of BMW in a short quiz. Fortunately, my brother's propensity to read a lot rubbed on me in the intermediate elementary levels and more so in HS and picked up some of these acronyms. Only a few of us in class got the meaning of the acronym.

Asian history subject under Mr. Polotan opened our eyes to the realities of Asian geopolitical dynamics. Interesting was the concept of Two Chinas which continues to function to this day with an increasingly tenuous dynamic. I am sure there were numerous topics in Asian history but the tension of Two China's had a more lasting imprint.

High School mathematics especially algebra and geometry were also memorable not only because of how tough it could be but also because of our teachers. Our teachers were Mr. Limbaco (Algebra I), Ms. Gigi Katigbak (Algebra II) and Ms. Ruth Posio (3rd year Geometry). These subjects are very useful in the increasingly numerical and digital world. Economics, my graduate degree in college and in graduate school, required a relatively high degree of mathematical proficiency as theorems and statistical models were argued in mathematics from simple algebra to calculus and topography. Some of these had to be learned independent of any course but I think high school mathematics and its discipline helped me substantially.

Trigonometry though was something else. I had a hazy memory of trigonometry. Our teacher then was Mr. Guarin. I wish I took trigonometry seriously but laziness drove me to rely on my classmates. I remember Andrew Castañeda, Victor Revilla, Victor Garcia, Bobby Ilagan and Ray Caguioa working through the trigonometry exercises and tutoring me. I did not realize that trigonometry would be important until college.

Listening to lectures on theorems and doing exercises and home works were not particularly exciting. We did not seriously consider the benefits of doing these. We just coasted along and understood the basics that were enough to get us by. I think if I had taken these seriously, graduate studies would be significantly easier and professional life would have taken a different path.

Hats off to our teachers. Our teachers persevered to teach us and to push us from our comfort levels by giving tough exercises and tests. I realized belatedly that the groundwork of these mathematics courses and the discipline that it implicitly teaches would be very important in college and in my career. Nevertheless, I am thankful for all our teachers who took the extra effort,

persevered and sacrificed. Unfortunately, we adolescents at times ridicule our brave teachers in private. They are happy when we overcome difficulties and are successful in our course work. But they too are sad when we easily give up and are unsuccessful even as they take extra steps to help overcome academic and development difficulties. We should in fact be grateful for being blessed with and be respectful to our selfless teachers.

I personally experienced the difficulties and pain to teach high school students. I believe that teaching is a career that embodies Man for Others emphasis of Jesuit and Ateneo education. (Teaching is not the only way to be Man for Others. Other fields of endeavors can be an avenue to be Man for Others. I realized it is how we treat others that is more critical in becoming a Man for Others. Genuinely caring for them and their families is a manifestation of Christ's love and in so doing be a Man for Others.) By God's grace and in my talks with Fr. Jim O'Brien, the American Jesuit wearing a safari hat walking around the high school in slippers (because of his skin condition) and our 3rd year High School teacher in English Literature, I accidentally met Joey Mendoza and Boogie Gumabao. Both were Ateneo college graduates who opted to teach in the high school after graduation and helped reignite the desire among Ateneo college graduates to give back to the high school alma mater by assisting in the formation of young men. In my mind Dr. Onofre Pagsangjan was one of the first Ateneo college graduates to have opted to be an instrument of formation of teenagers. Both Joey and Boogie encouraged me to teach in high school.

I and Joel Lopa, a friend and batchmate, decided to give high school teaching a try. I was fortunate that Fr. Jim lobbied for me to teach 3rd year religion and ethics and 4th year religion sociology-economics - Tulong Dunong. There were times of great happiness and satisfaction but there were also times of sadness and frustration. Happiness for me as a teacher is seeing my students work hard, take initiatives and successfully launch projects. I was blessed with Tulong-Dunong classes that put together and produced fund-raising shows that exhibited their talents. My religion and ethics classes were also a source of joy as we discussed scripture and some ethical questions.

But there were difficult times too. Frustrating times that despite all the effort, understanding, leniency and sacrifices, some things do not improve. I learned that there are a number of important and critical things that are beyond me and best left to God and Jesus Christ. I learned to offer these joyful and also difficult times to God and Christ and through Mother Mary's caring and intercession. I learned too of humility and to surrender to Him when things turned for the worse and to allow Him to work his wonders. Prayer, patience and humility were virtues that I also learned from our religion teachers including Mr. Mon Falgui, Fr. Joey Cruz, S.J., high school faculty colleagues Fr. Jess Lucas and Fr. Jim O'Brien.

Unfortunately, sadness and frustration dominated my disposition on my second and last year. In a faculty retreat, I actually shed tears out of frustration. Dr. Pagsi comforted by saying (and am paraphrasing) that positively influencing even one person should be gratifying enough and is a blessing. I sadly decided that teaching was not for me. Ironically, I had been blessed to have eventually "taught" or strictly mentor subordinates who eventually received accolades from institutional investors and awards from respected specialized magazines.

Our English composition and literature teachers aside from Fr. Jim O'Brien, were Ms. Pat Cordero, Ms. Ching Cheekee and Mr. Pedroche. Our class also had the opportunity to have briefly Mr. Yerro as our English literature teacher. They helped us appreciate good composition as well as American and English literature. We had difficulty reading through classic American short stories as well as Shakespeare and English poets. But our teachers were patient and persevered as we together with the class crawled through Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies as well as sonnets, poems and short stories not only by Shakespeare but also by Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Lord Byron, William Butler Yeats, Edgar Allan Poe, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thor Heyerdahl among others. I learned throughout my professional career that great communication skills bring one a long way in one's career especially if the idea one is communicating is well-thought out, analyzed and researched. One of the skills aside from good composition writing is public speaking.

If you are afraid of speaking publicly, then you will squirm and tremble in junior year. Our 3rd year English class required everyone to speak publicly (in front of the class) at least three times during the school year - a type of speech per quarter. There are four types of speeches - informative, demonstrative, persuasive and entertaining. I do not remember the topics for each of my 5-minute public speaking requirements. But I remember that we were so anxious of our turn to speak in the covered courts that we hardly listened to the speaker. I look back at this requirement with gratitude especially with the briefings that I did for small and large groups as Philippine and emerging Asia market economist for a global European bank. It taught me to speak confidently knowing that with hard work and extensive preparations I would know more than the listeners even though they had been following and investing in the Philippines and other emerging Asian markets.

We also had Pilipino and Philippine literature. We were blessed that we had a caring and patient teacher. Ms. Ellen Diaz, like some of our teachers, is demanding. Correct Pilipino and studying Filipino literature were not enough. What I remember is that the class had to stage a few Pilipino plays from script to production and actual performance. Although I played minor parts in the actual production and performance, the activity exposed us not only to the difficulties of staging a production more so in Pilipino at that but also the importance of teamwork. Our group leaders were so persistent, patient and at times perfectionists. I remember Jess Curabo, Francis Quito and Sonny José mapped out critical parts in the whole production. Jombee Balce, Dingdong Alfonso and Pepito Cabral would at times be main characters in the plays.

To me, Pilipino has helped in communicating and connecting with Filipino communities. Part of my college student life was briefly spent with farmer and labor groups. Learning good Pilipino helped significantly. I credit my Pilipino to my HS teacher and college teacher. I was encouraged to read Liwayway magazine to deepen my use of Pilipino and to deepen my understanding of the Filipino absent of any opportunity in high school to live even for a few days with farmers or workers.

Joel and I were bold to offer this opportunity of experiencing life with farmers to our high school students. Bold since martial law was still enforced in 1979 and since we were greenhorns in the vocation of forming young Ateneans. Undaunted we together with the University's Office of Social Concerns and Involvement (OSCI) during the dry season break between school years brought a few brave young students for an exposure to live with farmers and their families in Central Luzon for a few days - experiencing the difficulties of life in the rice farms while realizing

not to waste the fortunate situation they were in. I admire these few high school students who endured a few tough days with rice farmers and their families. I believe that they learned a lot.

Science has been a weak subject for me especially as the subjects move to more abstract areas. I enjoyed biology specifically botany and zoology but scientific nomenclatures and categorizations were way above my head. I recall Ms. Sacramento, our Biology teacher, who was strict and strong minded in class. However, she was the opposite outside the classroom - a caring and warm-hearted person. Science became more nebulous for me in 3rd year physics and 4th year chemistry. We tried to learn angles of deflection and refraction - helpful for after class sessions at the Pink House billiards hall - to calculating speed, distance and energy. Dr. Rivas was our kind-hearted teacher but a tough grader. We had to also learn the rudiments of chemistry including covalent, ionic, hydrogen bonds and simple calculations. I admire our Chemistry teacher Ms. Purita Martin for being so understanding, persevering and calm in teaching us.

Art was one of my favorite subjects. Ms. Brenda Fajardo who was also our Art Club moderator introduced us to different styles and periods in the Art World. I particularly enjoyed our class work on copper tooling. This was memorable since the copper tooling I made of a single rose touched a faculty member who wanted it. But I am not a good sketcher. A revelation that becoming an artist or taking a fine arts career was out of the question.

High school life is not complete without the challenges of external-curricular activities including membership(s) in clubs or teams and Saturday soirées and parties and political activism. These also help build character, in my view.

Blitz chess game during class breaks and in the chess clubs. Our chess players who would play a match or two of Blitz chess were Josue Baroña, Ray Caguioa, Bobby Ilagan and Andrew Castañeda. Tough matches raised the level of bragging rights for the victor. To me, these matches not only trained the mind but to act decisively under pressure while avoiding or minimizing errors.

Track and field was a very popular extra-curricular activity. Ticket to membership is sticking successfully to months of training culminating in school competitions and meets in January. Being given a Track and Field Varsity competition outfit and more importantly a jacket - a prized possession - was the climax for most of us. Training was increasingly difficult and challenging as January neared. Preparation for competition exacted effort, energy and time starting from July's three-days a week training after classes to everyday training from September/October until the general meet in late January. Saturday mornings eventually became a fixture to the training schedule and was important as time-trails were conducted. We liked Monday's long runs which passed through girls'/women's only school and college then known as Maryknoll and through La Vista's steep climbs and runs. We abhorred Wednesday's or Thursday's runs or sprints from the lowest portion of the paved road of the university at San José Seminary, ascending past the College Covered Courts and ending after the last steep and gasping run ending at the main road. Doing one run up and a cool down run back to the Seminary was already tongue-hanging-out run. But doing this at least five times was not only tiring but excruciating. Our long-distance runners, Bert Mendoza in particular who joined the elite medium- to long-distance runners, would do more including sprint the uphill run. And they were rewarded with triumphs during the school meets and general meets. I tried to focus on the 400-meter sprint and was good enough. There were

better sprinters in the team. Nevertheless, opportunities were given if one performed during the Saturday time trials. I am grateful to Coach Fr. Croghan to have run 4x400 meter relay in a school meet. Well, I failed to catch up with the leader in my part of the relay. But our team mates were able to salvage a school meet victory. Felix Santillan was our champion shot-putter, javelin and discus thrower while Ariel Africa was one of our stronger hurdlers in the 100m and 200m. Hard work, perseverance, heart (more popularly known nowadays as Gilas's battle cry "PUSO!"), extensive and consistent preparations and going the extra mile in preparations lead to glory. That's character building!

Earning the intra-year intramural championship basketball banner was a hotly contested event among the different sections of the batch. Our varsity Eaglets mainstays - Chito Narvaza, Zandy Calangi, Ed Congo, Jimmy Tioseco and Eaglet's team managers Bok Villamor and Ike Austria convened the class to plan out the championship run for the three team categories (Team A-C). The class was endowed with physically active basketball players. So, the class made sure that every team classification had good manpower and talent to contest the team championships. Class unity, team work and practice paid off with championship banners for Team A and Team C (if my recollection is correct).

Political activism inside the high school reached its peak in our early years or in the early 1970s with anti-American imperialism and demonstrations coursing through the corridors of the high school and ending in the covered courts for a sit-in. High school activists shout for boycott (classes) and numerous students would stream out of the classrooms for anti-imperialism demonstration at the covered courts. Ben Ollero was one of those who would call out the class to participate. I think we got involved in some of these boycotts.

But one eye-opener for me was my participation in a demonstration after quarterly exams. The march started from Mendiola and snaked through the University Belt and Chinatown ending at Plaza Miranda. Anti-US and anti-Chinoy aspersions and deprecatory slogans were shouted. I felt that I too was being criticized despite demonstrating against oppression and poverty. Once in Plaza Miranda I left and took the jeepney back home. I left dispirited, humiliated and humbled. But this event did not deter me to be involved in socio-political issues in college.

The fun part of high school life were the soirées and class parties with girls schools. Poch Piezas, Val Mayuga, Philip Varona, Mario Rotea and Peter Laurel (our chick boys) would meet with class leaders of girls' schools to set up soirées and parties! These were opportunities for bonding among classmates and exploring relationships with the girls. Ben, batch mate Rene Mercado and I would also go party gate-crashing if no class party was scheduled while avoiding a boring Saturday night. Normally, we did not stay long if we were gate-crashing and sometimes moved on to another venue. But if we had a class party, Ben and I would stay a while and enjoy the company of classmates and girls or young ladies of girl-school class or sister class. Learning to interact and respect the ladies and classmates in an out-of-school settings is quite rewarding. Of course, come Monday a lot of ribbing, joking and taunting among classmates and friends transpire through the morning. This indeed is part and parcel of real life even now as we are older and continue to grow old. Such events and reactions instructed me to take things in stride and in response to just bring out a smile.

In closing, high school has been indeed a road to self-realization and self-actualization. Embracing the challenges of high school from academics to extra-curricular activities is a key. Also putting in the time, effort and sweat make high school life not only an adventure but also rewarding endeavor.

At times, these random events when put together weave a story of Divine Providence. That these events, defining moments, combine to develop a person that is capable to achieve some success in career, happiness in family relations and deep friendships while unwittingly exemplify being Man for Others. I do not claim to be such and likely I am just a smidgeon of being such a person. But as long as we continue to strive to care for others every day and every moment, I believe we are on the path to becoming Christ-like.



## Part 2

### *Life After the Ateneo*



## Chapter 13

### In Search of the Sweet Spot in the C-Suite

Greetings to my fellow Ateneans! It has been several decades since I left the campus at Loyola Heights and yet the education, values and friendships continue to influence my life and outlook.

It is a privilege to share with you my professional journey which has been intellectually and spiritually fulfilling. It has been surprising; I feel blessed and am eternally grateful. However it is not by any means perfect and free of disappointments.

A little bit of my background. I graduated from the Ateneo with a BS in Management and worked for two years in Manila. I went back to school at New York University where I obtained an MBA in Finance.

In the 80's and 90's I worked for American Express and GE Capital. My first CFO experience was with a division of GE Capital in the mid 90s. I have been in various Finance leadership roles ever since. In the last 22 years I had a short stint with a private equity group and then joined a large global financial services company based in Europe. My career gave me the opportunity to experience and live in major cities in the Rockies and the East and West Coasts of the US, London, Central Europe and Hong Kong.

I recently retired and looking back at the years, here are some key takeaways that hopefully will help you in your journey.

**Every day is a school day. There is always something new to learn and it is important to stay current with new developments in your field or industry.** It was a different world when I graduated from high school, undergrad and graduate school. The field of Finance has gone through major changes since my graduation and through it all there are a lot of lessons learned and advancement in technical analysis. Fortunately I am passionate about Finance and have taken the time and energy to learn. This involved lots of research, reading and talking to experts. It was not easy since the topics became more complex as my career advanced and it required discerning the level of depth necessary to be effective. Over time I became better at this and took less time to grasp new stuff. This is ironic since I was a marginal student in high school and barely passed Algebra, Geometry and Physics. It was not until college when I became serious with my studies. I never imagined being in Finance much less lead a team of quants and actuaries.

A corollary to this is you must first **learn to understand in order to be understood**. This is looking at things from another perspective, knowing your audience and reading between the lines. I tend to be outspoken and have to be reminded of the importance of listening, probing and being patient. This helped a lot in adapting my communication and management styles. There is a lot of diversity among individuals and across different cultures. I tailored my style to the people I worked with and the corporate culture. GE Capital in the 90s was a very different company. At the time GE was very entrepreneurial, much admired and disciplined. It had an environment that was rigorous, aggressive and competitive, sometimes even combative. When I left GE to join a

European based company, I had to adapt and change my style. It was more effective to have a friendly approach and still be competitive and demanding. When I worked in the UK, everyone was soft spoken and very polite. You do not raise your voice or get excited even during a heated debate. Then during my stint in Central Europe I had to be conscious that while English was the main language in the company, working with people from other countries meant that the same phrase will have different meanings depending on the culture and individual.

Learning was not just mastering the technical aspects of my field. Having different roles and moving across divisions and countries, I had to continuously acquire knowledge of the business, its products and the people. The last being crucial – who can you trust, rely on and if you have the right team.

This leads to my next takeaway: **Be comfortable with ambiguity. There are no roadmaps – you will have to figure it out and chart your own course.** Having obtained the education and staying current with financial theory (aka being book smart), the next step is to have the smarts to determine what to apply and how (street smart). The more senior the role, the less guidance on how to do the job. I have taken on numerous projects and responsibilities where I was just provided with the objective and desired outcome. It was left up to me to get it done. It can be daunting and overwhelming. This brings to mind an overseas assignment during the financial crisis of 2008. My colleagues warned me that it was the toughest job in the company even without the impact of the declining financial market. I had to meet with the financial regulators the day after I started. They had a laundry list of items to address and by when. This was a regulator who was very intrusive and had the authority to shut us down if I did not deliver. While I had the support of the company, it was up to me to fix it. It took some brainstorming and understanding of the issues. The financial crises created lots of issues and it came down to identifying what took priority based on a simple cost benefit approach. It took almost a year to fully resolve the list of actions from the regulators. They closely monitored our progress and adherence to the due dates. There were periodic meetings with the regulators who asked for documented proof of progress and justification for next steps. The impact of the financial crisis and the demands from the regulators were immediate and changed the rules of the game. I remember telling my wife just prior to starting that it would be a short term assignment and we should keep our house in the US since we will have to relocate back soon. Soon ended up being 11 years later. I was given a promotion after 22 months and moved to another city. This further led to other roles that then postponed coming back to our home in the US.

One thing I learned and developed: **Be resilient. Do not be afraid to go out of your comfort zone. Take on a challenge and focus on the objective. There is always a tendency to be derailed and discouraged. Do not give up.**

I had two bosses early in my career who said that I was not CFO material. Even though I was disappointed, I asked for feedback and made the discussions constructive. Always have a good outlook and stay positive. I learned in one of my philosophy classes that we are always in the process of being. We can become more than what we are.

I was drawn to roles that were difficult and sometimes had a high probability of failure. I got personal satisfaction in overcoming a challenge and adding value to the organization. What

helped was staying focused on the objective, having a good team and trying different ways to solve a problem. There were projects that had the best laid plans and timeline only to be halted or diverted because of unexpected obstacles. There were instances when my team was ready to give up and it was my job to keep going, find a different approach and ultimately solve the issue.

In these times, **faith and self confidence were the force multipliers**. I did not have these in abundance in high school. I did not think they were important. Over time they are what made the difference and kept me going. Putting on a game face to energize the team and persevering can be done with self confidence. It takes faith for things to go your way and find a solution. Faith was my compass and helped me to face down difficult and unpleasant situations.

There were times when I was unpopular especially when it came to cutting expenses and aiming for higher growth. These were the right things to do at the time and it was my job to make them our objectives. And guess what – we got the job done. One of my roles was the CFO for Europe and had financial management responsibility over several countries. Imagine an Ateneo-educated Pinoy who is not tri-lingual and has only lived in the Philippines and the US going head to head with alpha CFOs of these countries. I did this for four years and never missed our financial targets.

**What motivated and enabled my career was my family.** I persevered and worked hard because of my responsibility to my wife and children. In our career we aspire for work-life balance and its definition is subjective. To me it was about being happy at work and equally being happy at home. I am very fortunate and grateful to have a family that was very supportive and adaptable. Especially because we moved across the US and internationally.

My fellow Ateneans, you have an exciting future ahead. Leverage your Jesuit education and be guided by your family and values. You might be surprised at what you can accomplish.



## **Chapter 14**

### **Transformation in Faith**

by Fr. Victor Limjuco Garcia, OFM Cap.

Dear fellow 4C classmates:

If I were to briefly put my so-called transformation in faith into simple terms, I would say that it was a realization that, after so many years living a blessed life, not only was it time for me to pay the Lord back for all His blessings and relentless patience but it was also time for me to go back to Him fully committed as a religious.

I felt that the good Lord had been knocking on my door for so long, and that I had been ignoring Him or perhaps even purposely looking the other way, not wanting to face His callings, which came in various ways and events in my life. Then, finally, at age forty-nine, I (gosh darn) finally had the courage (the “balls,” if you will) to do something about it.

Although it may seem that this decision came in a flash, like a lightning bolt, it did not. This decision took all my life to come to fruition. It started in Prep F, when I somehow sensed that I was not really in control of my life and that it was something or someone, beyond my parents and siblings, who was always there for me (I was the youngest and the only boy among the siblings).

I realized this when I was able to answer a somewhat difficult question posed by our teacher in class, about this short story we were reading for English, “Little Black Sambo.” I don’t rightly recall the teacher’s question. But I remember that no one in class could answer it. The silence in class was deafening. So after a few seconds (which seemed forever), I raised my hand to answer. To my surprise and amazement, I was able to give her the correct response. This was the first time I had ever gotten a compliment from our teacher, who said, “Very good, Victor.” And while this was all happening in front of me, I still believed, with wonderment, that I had little or nothing to do with the correct answer. Since then, I have been convinced that there was something or someone that had guided me through this strange experience.

It was not a “voice” telling me what to do (as most might think), but it was more like a guiding, protecting energy that would somehow manifest itself in various situations, as what might be witnessed (or perhaps even felt, tasted, or related to) in the stories in Luke’s “Acts of the Apostles,” where God’s handiwork is at work with His people, if you will. This personal thought and feeling never left me. And, to this day, I am constantly reminded and awed by it in many of the situations in my life. “How could I ignore or even overlook this powerful and ever-present thing?” I would ask myself.

I proceeded with my life having this always in mind. Those who knew me or grew up with me may have sensed that there was something odd or quirky about me. I am very happy that most of you tolerated this.

Thanks to our high school principal Fr. Raymond Miller's letter of recommendation, I was accepted to continue and finish my senior year in the US at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, New Jersey. God's hand continued to show and His blessings continued to cascade from there, through Columbia College, graduate school in architecture in University of Colorado, Denver, through my professional licensing and registration and work opportunities in New York City and beyond.

Then, at forty-three years of age, on my twenty-third (or so) year working as a professional in New York, I started to seriously go through a regimen of constant prayer, continual searching and seeking of the Lord, and yes, Holy Scripture (Bible) Study classes. I even joined dating groups for young adults to find out if marriage and family life were the right vocation for me. But somehow, as it turned out, it was not the right place for me. So onwards I went with more discernment and prayer.

Six years later, at the tender age of forty-nine, in the year of our Lord 2007, I found myself applying to become a religious, entering as a postulant in the Province of St. Mary, of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins, New York-New England. Formation usually took eight to nine years of fraternity, ministry, philosophy, and theology (seminary), but I was credited for the core curriculum courses I had taken in Columbia. I professed my perpetual vows as a Capuchin Franciscan on September 17, 2011. Then I was ordained transitional deacon on October 6, 2012. Three years later, I was ordained priest on July 13, 2015.

I celebrated my first mass in Sta. Rita De Cascia Parish Church in PhilAm Homes, Diocese of Cubao. This was the parish church where I grew up in Quezon City, and where I saw some of you guys again, like Hector (Icky) and Arturo (Love) Faylona and other Ateneans from different classes, after so many years.

After finishing my tenure at St. Joseph the Worker Church in East Patchogue, Long Island, New York, I was assigned my first mission to Guam, at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, for almost four years (2017- 2021). I am currently in my second mission assignment here in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Jebel Ali.

Dear Brothers in Christ, I hope I have said enough of how I may have turned to be this way, all for the sake and name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.

Please note that my choice of vocation is no different from the vocations you guys have chosen for yourselves. Amen?

*Pax et bonum,*  
Victor



## **Chapter 15**

### **The Road That I Have Taken**

by Jess Curabo

Do you still remember the poem by Robert Frost about two roads that diverged in a wood? There are roads less travelled. There are roads not taken. This is about the one road that I took that made a huge difference for me. This one road that I remember with great delight is the road that brought me to the Ateneo, as well as to the other roads I have since taken—because of my time at the Ateneo.

It was my father who really wanted me to go to the Ateneo. I would have personally preferred a high school that was closer to where we lived in Sta. Cruz, Manila. But he was quite adamant. So, I applied and was accepted together with a few other boys from other schools.

Traffic flowed faster in those days even on EDSA. But Loyola Heights was still quite a distance from our home. That meant taking the gray school bus. I was bus rider number four on bus number fourteen. That also meant waking up earlier in the morning. I had to be at the pick-up point, which was several blocks from our house, by the time the school bus pulled up. I did miss the bus a few times, which meant taking a taxi by myself all the way to Katipunan. And the taxi fare came out of my allowance.

Taking the bus to school and back was my introduction to Daily Commute 101. Since the bus was largely empty when I got on, I always had a choice of seats. I chose to sit a couple of rows behind the driver. In time, I made friends with quite a few of my bus mates. And by the time I was in fourth year, I knew practically everybody on the bus.

As a freshman, high school was quite an adjustment for me. I felt much like the odd man out since most of my classmates had already been together for eight years in grade school. I was encouraged, however, when two boys made an effort to befriend me. It made me feel less alone. As a teenager in a new school, I just wanted to belong and find some semblance of acceptance in this strange new environment called high school.

There were quite a few times that I felt like the outsider looking in. There were a few bullies, too. But as the years rolled by, I did find my niche and made some really good friends.

The Ateneo de Manila high school will always hold a special place in my heart. I have wonderful memories that still make me smile and chuckle. The classmates that I remember most are not just the ones who were smart or funny or those who got in trouble with the teachers. I fondly remember those who were kind to me—just because.

I remember class nights and soirees, the retreat in Novaliches, and the great outing in Matabungkay. And who wouldn't remember NCAA (Ateneo vs. La Salle) and NCEE (we were the first batch to take the national college entrance examination).

There were some teachers who didn't seem to care whether you passed or failed. But there were a special few who made a genuine difference in my young life, like Mrs. Pat Cordero. It was Mrs. Angelita Perez who showed me how to make good *papier-maché* figures, and I learned the fine points of oil painting from Ms. Brenda Fajardo. One good thing about art class was that it was right next to the cafeteria. We would always be the first in line for lunch, before the hordes of other boys came rushing in.

I remember two Jesuits with great fondness—Rev. Fr. Julian Pastor, who was always gentle and kind; and Rev. Fr. James O'Brien, who gave me my first ever 100 in my report card.

I would have wanted to continue on to college at the Ateneo. But I ended up going to UP Diliman instead, where my father wanted me to take accounting.

I finally graduated with a degree in business economics. It was several years after college that I discovered humanitarian work. It was in working with Indo-Chinese refugees that I found deep personal satisfaction. This would eventually lead me to serve full-time in Christian ministry as a pastor and teacher.

From the Ateneo, the road has taken me to this wonderful season where I am joyfully doing Kingdom work for the greater glory of God. “*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*” is no longer an old Latin maxim. It is a guide post with which I measure where I have been, what I have become, and where I am going. This truth is timeless. It was true then, and it is still true today.



## Chapter 16

### A Faith Journey

by Jess Curabo

Faith is a deeply personal thing. And, yet, it is one of those crucial life choices that ultimately defines a person.

The practice of our Christian faith wasn't something that was methodically "enforced" by the Jesuits at the Ateneo. It was subtle. But it permeated the way that we were educated. There was a consistent, quiet, almost imperceptible emphasis, on Ignatian spirituality—an attitude of gratefulness, an awareness of God's presence in everyday experiences, and an active living out of what it meant to be "a man for others."

Ateneo had a tremendous impact on my personal spiritual journey. *Lux in Domino* and *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* were not just old Latin maxims to me. Instead, they became guideposts and meaningful watchwords in my faith journey.

Moving to UP Diliman after the Ateneo high school greatly expanded my perspectives. The daily interaction with students from diverse backgrounds coming from all over the Philippines enriched my appreciation for everything that the Ateneo had taught me. The Ignatian disciplines prepared me to sift through the radical ideas and new schools of thought that I encountered in UP. And I continued to consistently practice the disciplines that firmly anchored my faith in God.

I still remember serving as a sacristan at the Espiritu Santo Parish Church in Sta. Cruz, Manila as a young boy. The mass then was still said in Latin and the priest still had his back to the parishioners. That experience allowed me to observe everything up close and personal—from assisting the priest in putting on his vestments, to responding to the prayers, pouring the wine, helping with Communion, and finally following the priest back to the sacristy at the close of the Mass.

The foundations of the Sacraments and the rituals of the Church were practices that encouraged me to seek an even deeper understanding of the things of the Spirit.

But it was my own personal encounter with the Christ of the Scriptures that tempered my personal ambitions and persuaded me to say good-bye to my dreams of personal greatness.

I decided to forgo a scholarship to a university in the US because it would take me away from volunteer work with street children. I later found a job working with Indo-Chinese refugees in Morong, Bataan. That job opened new doors for me to pursue a career in humanitarian work in the US, which I also turned down because I wanted to continue ministering to children in the Philippines. Still, the opportunities kept coming for me to study, work, and live in the US. I finally settled for work with a US-based Christian ministry organization. This allowed me to travel and engage with churches in thirty-nine of the fifty states and to do training and ministry in thirty-seven countries around the world. But my heart was really set on serving the children of my own country. Then, as now, I knew that this was where I was called to serve and live out my calling and my journey of faith.

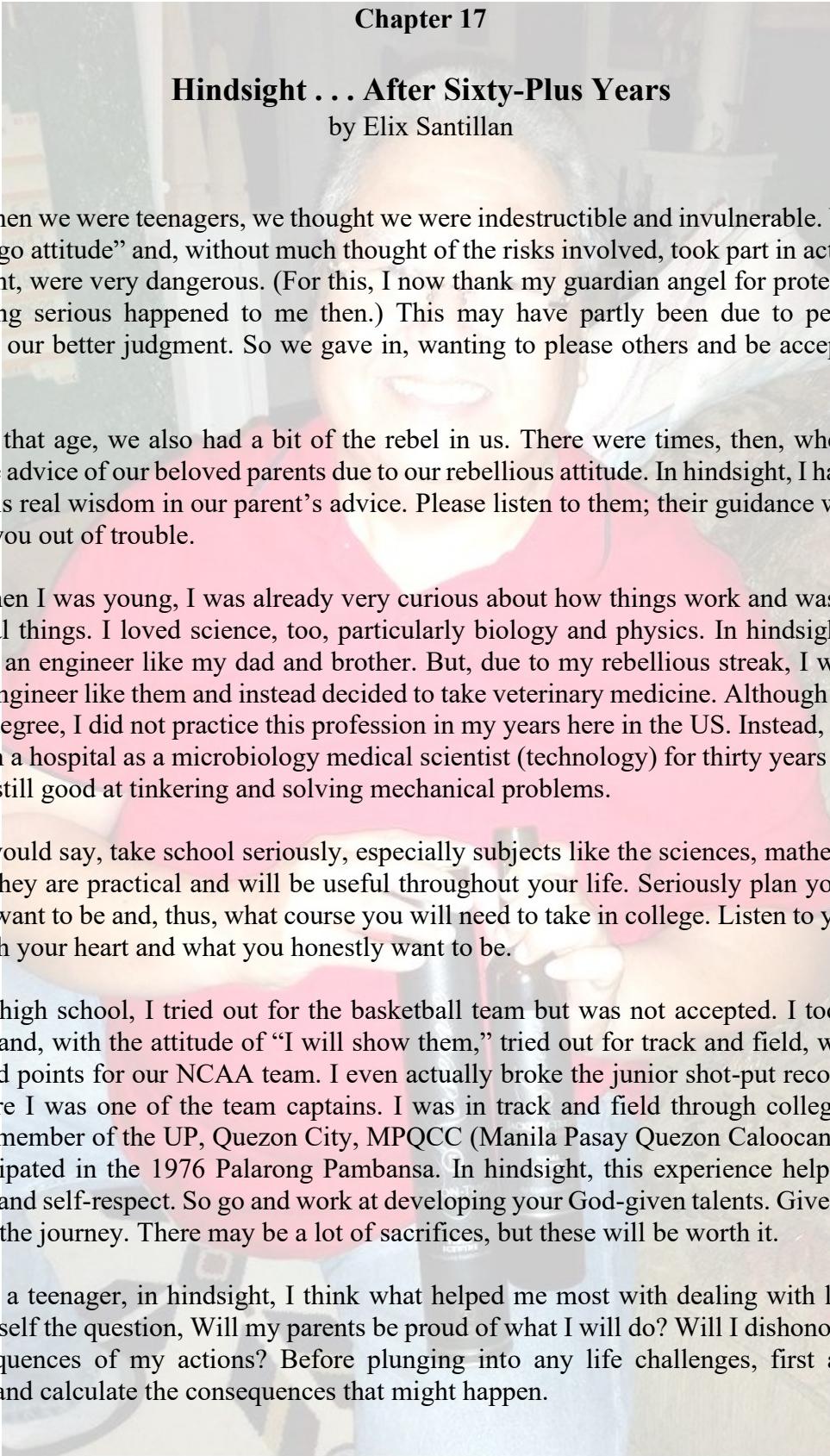
In this season of life, when my sight is beginning to fail and my body is not as spry, my physical stamina is no longer what it used to be but my passion for the children of the Philippines remains strong.

Do I get envious of friends who have made it in society and business and who have gained titles and recognition? Not really. Do I wish I had a bigger house? Sometimes. Do I wish I had more funds than expenses? Certainly. Do I regret anything? Not in the least.

And when I look back at the things that I learned at the Ateneo, I am grateful for a life rooted in faith and lived out in the light that God provides. I find joy and peace in serving the Lord and my fellow man. I enjoy a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, that I have made more good choices and wise decisions than poor ones.

My prayer is that I shall finish strong. And when I am called home to glory and I stand before my Master and King, I would like to hear Him say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant . . .”





## Chapter 17

### Hindsight . . . After Sixty-Plus Years

by Elix Santillan

When we were teenagers, we thought we were indestructible and invulnerable. We boasted a “go, go, go attitude” and, without much thought of the risks involved, took part in activities that, in hindsight, were very dangerous. (For this, I now thank my guardian angel for protecting me so that nothing serious happened to me then.) This may have partly been due to peer pressure overriding our better judgment. So we gave in, wanting to please others and be accepted by our peers.

At that age, we also had a bit of the rebel in us. There were times, then, when we went against the advice of our beloved parents due to our rebellious attitude. In hindsight, I have realized that there is real wisdom in our parent’s advice. Please listen to them; their guidance will, believe me, keep you out of trouble.

When I was young, I was already very curious about how things work and was good with mechanical things. I loved science, too, particularly biology and physics. In hindsight, I should have been an engineer like my dad and brother. But, due to my rebellious streak, I went against being an engineer like them and instead decided to take veterinary medicine. Although I graduated with this degree, I did not practice this profession in my years here in the US. Instead, I have been working in a hospital as a microbiology medical scientist (technology) for thirty years now. I am, however, still good at tinkering and solving mechanical problems.

I would say, take school seriously, especially subjects like the sciences, mathematics, and the arts. They are practical and will be useful throughout your life. Seriously plan your future—what you want to be and, thus, what course you will need to take in college. Listen to your parents but go with your heart and what you honestly want to be.

In high school, I tried out for the basketball team but was not accepted. I took this as a challenge and, with the attitude of “I will show them,” tried out for track and field, where I won medals and points for our NCAA team. I even actually broke the junior shot-put record in senior year, where I was one of the team captains. I was in track and field through college and even became a member of the UP, Quezon City, MPQCC (Manila Pasay Quezon Caloocan City) team that participated in the 1976 Palarong Pambansa. In hindsight, this experience helped me gain discipline and self-respect. So go and work at developing your God-given talents. Give it your best and enjoy the journey. There may be a lot of sacrifices, but these will be worth it.

As a teenager, in hindsight, I think what helped me most with dealing with life was my asking myself the question, Will my parents be proud of what I will do? Will I dishonor them with the consequences of my actions? Before plunging into any life challenges, first assess your decisions and calculate the consequences that might happen.

## Chapter 18

### Miracle Man

by Val Mayuga

I woke up on the morning of December 11, 2014, feeling off, like something wasn't right in the lower part of the back of my head. I took some Tylenol throughout the day, thinking it was just a mild headache. I had made plans to complete the upgrade of my aging 2008 MacBook and was looking forward to working on it the following day. I was also looking forward, in the long term, to my son Jovy getting married in seven months and to traveling to Europe with our close friends.

At 6:00 a.m. the following day, I woke up to discover that my eyes were no longer aligned; while my right eye was looking straight ahead, my left eye was looking way over to the left. Everything that I looked at was doubled, and the two images were so far apart that I couldn't merge them together. This made me nauseous. My right arm also now felt clumsy, and my right leg was starting to go numb.

Yep, it was a stroke. My wife, Marilu, drove me to Vancouver General Hospital, which as it turns out had the best neurological team, it being a teaching hospital. At the emergency room, after some tests and a CT scan, they determined that my stroke was of the hemorrhagic, or bleeding, variety. It was a cavernous malformation located in the very narrow pons area of the brain stem, but I won't go into the technical details.

I was going downhill fast. The bleeding wouldn't stop. Had it been the more common ischemic stroke, or blockage, there would have been remedies like blood thinners to get the blood flowing again to the brain. But because mine was a hemorrhagic stroke, they would not be able to stop the bleeding unless they operated on my brain, which I was told was a very delicate procedure as it would surely injure and/or paralyze me permanently.

I was numb. I couldn't swallow. I was always nauseous and throwing up. I couldn't get up. I couldn't see without a patch on my left eye. I had gone deaf in my left ear. I couldn't feed myself. I couldn't even pee or poop. Imagine how it is being unable to perform these most basic of functions that we all take for granted. There was one morning when I actually thought I was dying, and I was so afraid to fall asleep again in case I wouldn't wake up anymore. I texted Marilu to come quickly to the hospital, so I could say goodbye.

My neurological team was the best in the world, made possible by our excellent health-care system. They decided not to operate and instead wait and continue to monitor my situation, while keeping my blood pressure down. I must have undergone about eight MRIs in total. One of the doctors told Marilu that there wasn't much more they could do; she told the doctor that we can still pray for a miracle. World-class doctors though they are, they are merely human; they are not God.

Marilu and Jovy were always there for me, helping me, loving me. They were my constant source of strength. I couldn't have made it without them. I felt that with them around me, nothing could go wrong. Friends and family from all over the world were also storming the heavens praying for me. A healing mass with Father Rob, a Jesuit priest, was organized by the Ateneans of Vancouver. "For where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, there He is in their midst." How true this is.

Marilu asked if I wanted to see a priest, and I agreed. The priest heard my confession, administered the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and gave me Holy Communion.

After nine days of bleeding continuously, the bleeding miraculously stopped. It happened on Jovy's birthday. The doctor told my wife that we got the miracle we had prayed for. Who else could perform a miracle and stop the bleeding when all the top doctors couldn't do it? Our prayers for a miracle were answered, and resoundingly. For with God, nothing is impossible.

Actually, I chickened out and didn't confess everything to the priest the first time around, so I met with another priest a couple of days after the bleeding stopped. This time, I confessed everything, and I was given another anointing and communion. My penance was to pray for those who do not have Jesus in the center of their lives. That sounded more like a mission that was being given to me by the Lord. I still pray it to this day, and I pray specifically for those individuals who have asked for prayers and those who may need a hand in being closer to Jesus.

After that confession, I felt like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders, and I was ready. If He wanted me to come home to Him, so be it. I prayed to God and said that I surrender everything to Him, it's all up to Him now. His will, not mine. Thy will be done. This was my turning point, and this was when my spiritual conversion started.

I felt so much better after that. Over the next few days, my condition took a positive turn. With Marilu and Jovy by my side, we started celebrating the little miracles that came. We celebrated the moment I was able to pee and poop. We celebrated the fact that I was starting to hear faint sounds in my previously deaf ear. After almost three weeks in the hospital, the doctors determined that I was ready for rehab, and we celebrated that, too, even though I felt I wasn't ready yet.

I was admitted to the rehab center for an intensive program for about one-and-a-half months as an in-patient, and another one-and-a-half months as an out-patient. I named my team of therapists "God's Miracle Workers" because God worked His miracles through them; they were awesome. At one point, my physiotherapist decided I was ready to get up from my wheelchair and stand up on my own. I looked at her in disbelief and asked if she would catch me if I fell. I looked at Marilu and she stood there with a bucket in case I threw up. When the therapist urged me to get up, at that point I felt like it was like Jesus telling me to "get up, pick up my mat, and walk," the same way He instructed the paralytic in Bethesda. So, I placed my trust in Jesus, tried to see Him in the therapist, and willed myself to get up. And I did it! Another miracle.

When I was first admitted to the rehab center, the initial goal was to have me walking with some kind of aid, like a walker or a cane, upon my discharge. But my recovery had progressed

exponentially that they eventually revised the goal to have me walking on my own without any walking aid at discharge. A few days before the end of my rehab, I wasn't just walking—I was enjoying a ride on a bicycle. I was their poster boy for recovery.

In a follow-up visit with my neurologist after my discharge, he informed us that the most recent MRI showed that the lesion from the cavernoma had shrunk, and that the swelling had also been reduced, significantly. He also said that the results are now inconclusive as to whether the stroke was caused by the cavernous malformation or simply by high blood pressure. He said that the brain can work miracles. We rephrased that and said that it is God who works miracles.

I thank the Lord for His Divine Mercy. He has worked all these miracles not just for our family, but for all who have prayed for me. He wanted us to fully trust in Him and live in the present moment. May all be blessed in their own spiritual journeys, and may all be drawn closer to God as a result of this experience.

Soon after I was discharged from rehab in March 2015, Jovy made sure I realized my goal of completing the MacBook upgrade and accompanied me to the Genius Bar at the Apple store. He got married in July of that year, and I proudly walked him down the aisle with no walking aid whatsoever. I have a wife who I love dearly. I am now a happy grandfather of two. Our European trip with friends happened, and we had a blast. Fr. Rob, the Jesuit priest who officiated the healing mass for me, called me “Miracle Man” every time he saw me.

How am I now? I did not recover completely. I am left with a permanent numbness on my right side, mostly concentrated on the right leg, accompanied by permanent, right-sided aches and pains. I have regained most of my balance and have since purchased a bicycle for rides on nice, sunny days. My left ear has regained about 85 percent hearing. My left eye is once again aligned with the right, but I still have difficulty looking to the extreme left. I see these, however, as minor inconveniences, a reminder to offer up my suffering for those who do not have Jesus in the center of their lives, and a reminder of God’s immense love for me.

By the way, God loves you immensely, too.



## Chapter 19

### About Investing Wisely and Foolishly

By Sonny José

Society tends to celebrate the winners and condemn the losers. That is the hard truth and the brutal fact. But in life, sometimes we win, at other times we lose. It is all part of the cycle of living. It is all right to lose, to make mistakes as long as something good results from these. Call that: lessons learned.

We learn (or should learn) from the losses we experience, the mistakes we commit. Often, of course, we are prone to hiding our defeats, reluctant to highlight our mistakes, for it is quite uncomfortable and humiliating to admit to them. Pride and ego prevent us from acknowledging our failures. Regretfully so, because, at times, from the very ashes of failure arises a phoenix. From the seeds of a dead flower, germinates a new, beautiful rose.

Lessons learned from losses or mistakes ought to be openly shared, as a favor, at the very least, to the next person in order that he can avoid the tripwires along the way.

I recall an experience that, for me, was a harsh teacher, though I believe I have emerged from it with more sense and wisdom.

Back in 2006, after serving as head of an offshore hedge fund management firm, I decided to sell my company shares. I then ventured into private investing, equipped with the tools learned from a dual-track career in economics (i.e., understanding how the economy behaved, especially that capricious variable—interest rates—that shapes all economic and financial decisions, movements, and fluctuations, the other being demographics), and finance (i.e., as an investment professional, having the skill of screening and picking the winners over the losers from amongst the plethora of stocks as well as fund managers). In retrospect, I was blessed to have been thrust into jobs that exposed me to both worlds, understanding the macro and the micro bits of things.

After half a decade doing my own private-investing gig, I heard of this place called Ecuador. I had read in *International Living* about Ecuador as a retirement hotspot for *gringos*, especially the city of Cuenca, and it gave me an idea to look into the place (my list also included Mexico, Panama, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina).

Ecuador is one of only three countries in Latin America, the others being Panama and El Salvador, that use the American dollar as official currency. This is so because the country went into bursts of inflation and an economic tailspin during the nineties—just like the Philippines during the twilight of the Marcos era—and the International Monetary Fund/World Bank would only agree to a rescue package if Ecuador switched from the sucre to the greenback.

I did not bother to visit Quito, Ecuador's capital, until later. Quito is nestled in a valley high in the Andes at an elevation of 9,300 feet, second only to Bolivia's La Paz at 12,000

feet. Quito was the first city in Ecuador to be declared a UNESCO world heritage site (there is a magnificent Jesuit cathedral in the heart of the city). Cuenca, situated around 8,500 feet above sea level, was the second. This old *ciudad* (city) reached the peak of its importance in the first years of Ecuador's independence, which was achieved in 1820. It became the capital of one of the three provinces that made up the nascent republic, with the other two capitals being Guayaquil and Quito. If, today, Quito is the capital and Guayaquil in the coastal lowlands is the commercial hub, Cuenca is considered the cultural heart and soul of Ecuador. This old colonial jewel of the Andes (as Machu Pichu is for Peruvians) is a city of 500,000 and is not unlike our Vigan, in terms of cultural significance, and Baguio, with regard to its cool climate. When one asks locals about must-see places in Ecuador, Cuenca is *numero uno* on the list—and they state that with pride.

Cuenca has earned a reputation also as a hotspot for many *gringos jubilados* (North American retirees), a good 9,000 of them, drawn by the low cost of living (their pension cheques going a longer way), the mystique and charm of the colonial city, and its eternal spring weather, amidst the backdrop of the snow-capped Andes mountains. And along with the *gringos* also came the eternal spring of dollars. Oh, they love them there, but the love affair goes both ways.

I heard about Cuenca from a Welsh bloke who transplanted his young family to experience expat life in Latin America and who tipped me about a small cooperative bank called Cooperativa de Ahorro y Credito Coopera Limitada de Azuay, or Coopera Ltda. for short. The bank was offering *gringo* interest on US-dollar savings deposits of 10.5% to 11%. (Only in the ex-Soviet republics—Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—as well as Turkey and Mongolia could one fetch similarly high rates, though with much higher risks as the US dollar is not their official currency. In Ecuador, it is. And the country is a stable democracy. Presto!)

I met Juan Antonio (aka Juanito, *al igual que yo*), a young Ecuadorian born in Queens, New York, who repatriated back to his father's homeland after finishing college. He spoke perfect English and was the point man (a de facto private banker) for the *gringo* clientele of Coopera. A very amiable and affable fellow, young Juanito and I (as *homónimos*, having the same name) found that we had perfect chemistry together. Because of that, I managed to convince him and the general manager of Coopera to grant me 12% on a slightly bigger deposit placement. By Ecuadorian standards, I was considered high net worth, hence befitting special treatment (but not in the league of those who frequent Swiss banks in Zurich or Geneva). The meeting paid off, and wire transfers followed to open the accounts.

Coopera's head office was situated in San Joaquin, a short cab ride from *el centro*, west of downtown. However, the hub of its activities was based in the heart of a busy marketplace, called Feria Libre, not far from the old colonial district. And diligent Juanito was the personal magnet that attracted the *gringo* dollars in an aggressive deposit build-up operation. Just imagine the wonders a fluent English speaker could do for an up-and-coming financial institution, where a good 30 percent to 40 percent of its deposit base was sourced from the thriving *gringo* community. As more deposits kept streaming in, there was practically no competition for Coopera. And the banks, the other cooperatives, and the landed gentry—the old rich families of Cuenca—suddenly became nervous, suspiciously jealous, and then toxically envious. They were losing business and market share. The upstart had to be squashed like a fly. But more on this later.

According to Juanito, Coopera's business idea sprouted from Italian development aid experts. It was not complex. The indigenous population (comprising 25 percent of Cuenca) have limited access to credit, typical of many lower-income earners. Bank credit was logically the domain and realm of the more affluent and educated. The Italian advisers that conceived of Coopera introduced something innovative that sparked my interest and aroused my curiosity. It also had a social imperative and a noble purpose (now I am talking like a Jesuit). It appeared like a social enterprise, but was fueled by profits and business efficiency. Call that impact investing, an emerging trend at that time.

First, Coopera built an office to take in deposits, as a cooperative, like a rural bank, and like a real business. Then, they lent loans to their members-shareholders-depositors (all in one). This took the form, for example, of a crop loan to a fruit farmer. (I had actually seen them produce strawberries as big as a clenched human fist! Thanks to Ecuador's rich mix of volcanic soil, its temperate climate in the *montañas*, or mountains, and the industrious *campesinos*, or farmers). Loans also were granted to furniture makers; village women weaving those Panama hats (which actually originated in Cuenca) for export; cab and farm transport drivers; market vendors; poultry growers; fish merchants in Guayaquil who bring those fresh *pescados* (fish), *gambas* (prawns), *mejillones* (mussels), *vieiras* (scallops), and other fruits of the sea up to the highlands (to add iodine to their diets); handicraft makers, especially the *spondylus* (type of mollusk) craftsmen and jewelry makers; and many other small and indigenous entrepreneurs and businesswomen, who would not have enjoyed the same privilege from the old, traditional banks.

Coopera lent the deposited funds for 14 percent to 16 percent and paid their depositors (like me) anywhere from 10 percent to 12 percent. With such thin margins, the cooperative bank operated with a lean-and-mean staff compliment. As simple as that.

The secret to Coopera's success was that it was closely entwined with the lives of its *socios*, its members-shareholders-depositors, even the loan borrowers. First of all, they lent to their *socios*, who deposited their income and savings with Coopera, and who in turn also borrowed from Coopera to grow and germinate their business. The success of these businesses was at the very core of Coopera's mission.

Typically, Coopera situated its branch office next to a warehouse, which they upgraded and turned into a produce market, or *bodega-mercados*, replete with fresh produce and products from the farms, financed by their credit. Coopera sold and distributed fertilizers and farm implements and provided farm extension services or financial advice, such as budgeting (again an Italian concept) at a lower cost to ensure their investment churned out good produce, bankable clients, and successful enterprises. Unlike the typical banks, they treated their borrowers not as risk factors but as partners in success. Trust is built on this very business concept.

It did not end there. The borrower (farmer) sold his produce to Coopera at a price closer to the farm-gate price with a little premium added to outbid the middlemen. A rough example: envision a head of cabbage. Before Coopera came about, the poor indigenous farmer would sell his cabbage for, let's assume, \$0.25¢ to the middleman (and yet another middleman), who would sell it to a wholesaler, who would then re-sell it to the *supermercado* (supermarket), who would, finally, sell it to the consumer for \$1.00. Under the Coopera business model, the farmer would

bring his cabbage to Coopera's *bodega*, and Coopera would buy the cabbage for \$0.40¢. (Out of that, of course, the farmer would need to pay, maybe, \$0.05¢ for transport from his farm to the *bodega*.)

The farmer ends up with \$0.10¢ more for every head of cabbage he sold. He makes a gross profit of \$0.10¢ per cabbage head or one-third more than what he would earn from selling to a middleman (or a string of them). He would now be able to afford to send his children and wife to a doctor and obtain medical treatment. He would be able to buy his daughters school books and supplies. He would be able to afford to buy more seeds to plant other crops or maybe borrow funds to raise pigs and fowl. He would be able to afford to improve his family's diet, and, most of all, he would be able to afford to repay his loan to Coopera. Finally, the poor farmer or the small business owner would be able to reclaim his honor and dignity through honest, hard work, without being in bondage to the usurious loans charged by the bigger banks. The shackles and curse of poverty would then be broken.

Coopera did not stop there. Their *socios* could shop at their *bodega-mercados* with an instant discount of 10 percent on anything purchased. And, needless to say, Coopera's shops did not charge \$1.00 for each head of cabbage. They sold it for \$0.75¢, or a quarter less. Naturally, even the non-*socios* came to shop in droves at Coopera's popular *bodegas*, where the bargains were. (I recall buying four heavy grocery bags filled with chicken, pork, prawns, eggs, vegetables—including something resembling our Filipino *binatog* (boiled corn topped with freshly grated coconut, butter, and salt or sugar)—fruits, jams, fresh juice, and other items for a hefty \$12.

Coopera's success spread throughout the Province of Azuay. Just about every major town had a Coopera branch next to a *bodega-mercado*. Eventually, Coopera expanded to also cover the Province of Guayas down by the coast where lies the biggest city, Guayaquil.

As a result, the regular consumers were happy; the Coopera's *socios* were even happier; and the *gringos*, too, were very happy, receiving better returns on their investment. As expected, however, the old, traditional *supermercado* owners as well as the big banks and the middlemen, who thrived from profits off the backs of the poor *campesinos*, were not. The old vested interests became uneasy. They were vexed and perturbed. More accurately portrayed, they had turned vengeful and spiteful.

The rich families who coincidentally controlled the reins of power, just like the politicos in the *provincias* (provinces) in the Philippines, resorted to the dirty work of smearing the bank. By hook or by crook, they were determined to discover—or fabricate—anything to bring down that upstart, Coopera. The sooner, the better, and for good.

And they did find something, that the bank's general manager, Rodrigo Aucay, had facilitated the “go-around” or a sort of a detour to avoid the US dollar sanctions imposed on Venezuela by making available Coopera's rich stash of US currency deposits to Venezuelan banks, to enable Venezuelan foreign trade transactions. Not money laundering, but busting US sanctions against Venezuela.

The news leaked out in 2013. A bank run occurred. Locals scrambled to pull out their measly deposits from the main branch. The superintendent of financial institutions, who did not even call for an audit, unjustifiably and in a rush closed down Coopera. Its assets were then seized and immediately sold off at big discounts to its competitors, the other cooperative banks and the larger banks. A lawsuit was filed by the *gringos* and the rich Cuencano *socios*. I remember how the local judge listened dispassionately as our case was being presented, gazing all the while at her manicured fingernails, perhaps contemplating what color of nail polish to use next after the session ended.

At the end of the day, the populist President Correa in Quito dissociated himself from Rodrigo Aucay, who had supported him in the previous elections but was now simply too heavy political baggage to carry. Correa, however, ordered that those who deposited up to \$1,000 in Coopera be repaid in full. This numbered to a hundred thousand depositors. The small fry were content and satisfied. The next tranche addressed paying back those with up to \$50,000 in deposits. That brought relief to another three thousand distressed depositors. Those with more, however, were instructed to wait. They had to wait another two years to receive only \$50,000 and only upon submitting proof showing where their funds came from. As of 2021, there remain about a hundred and thirty or so of us who continue to await the return of our investment. For each of the past six years, the administrator appointed by the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, endeavored to pay back somewhere between \$1,200 to \$2,000 annually as a token, from whatever assets they could muster.

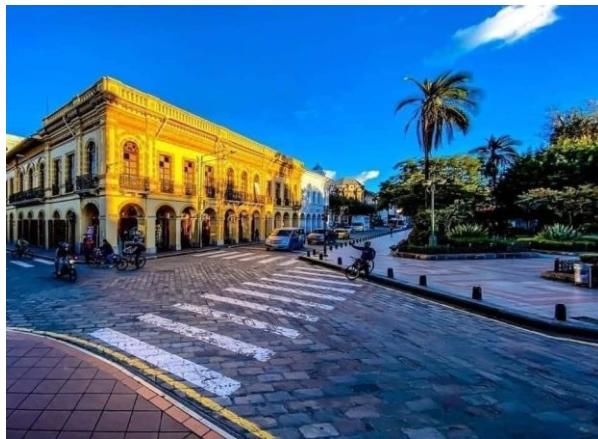
I figured there is no political recourse for the remaining holdouts and *socios* of Coopera. The US and Canadian consulates in Ecuador were indifferent and detached.

From this loss, the lessons learned:

Some things are too good to be true. Sometimes, toxic envy and greed lurk not far behind to bring down what is good. What starts as noble and honorable can at times end in disaster, despite the best of intentions.

As for whatever remains uncollected from Coopera, if ever this does get paid, I shall donate it to a worthy cause, or help out a sibling, or give it to a needy friend or relative, or even, maybe, fund a scholarship and plant a seed that will germinate and improve another soul's intent.

As an optimist, I believe that from the ruins of what was once Coopera there will soon rise again another phoenix, in whatever shape or form; that justice and truth always prevail in the end; and that, from this investment mistake, humility, goodness, and charity towards another will ensue. That is what I learned from the fiasco called Coopera.



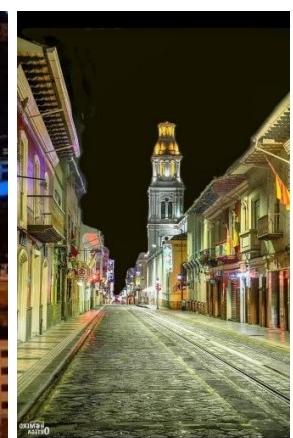
Parque Calderon, El Centro



Old Cuenca



Old Cuenca at night



Colonial District



Cuenca Cathedral at night



Colonial District, El Centro

## **Chapter 20**

### **Thoughts on Father's Day**

On the eve of Father's Day 2016, I ask myself, in reflection, what it is to be a father. I reckon there is more to fatherhood than merely passing on one's name, one's genes, and even one's legacy or inheritance to one's offspring. To be a father means, I think, to serve, to sacrifice, and to love one's family in the name and in honor of our Creator. As stewards and guardians of our children, it is not so much about "us," but more about "them." And so, in the words of St. Francis of Assisi, we give without expecting to receive, we love yet not expecting to be loved.

This reminds me of one silent dude in the Scriptures, a quiet worker called Joseph the Carpenter. There is not a single solitary word of wisdom ascribed to him, unlike many a prophet, yet he was a commanding presence and a testament to fatherhood. St. Joseph is deemed as the quintessential model of fatherhood and manhood as preached in the Christian churches, a man of humility, dedication, and loyalty to his wife and son. He is neither an Elon Musk nor a big benefactor like Bill Gates, but he carried his simple circumstances with such dignity. (I always remind myself that St. Joseph is my namesake.) I am also reminded of how the actor Jim Carey described his father as a "measly" accountant. Yet, even as he struggled in life, his greatest achievement and gift to his wife and children was "the freedom from concern."

I was somehow able to relate to this when, whilst travelling the dusty roads and rugged outback of rural Sierra Leone in 2015, I was asked by a very bright and talented twenty-four-year-old lass, "Kuya, what is your greatest accomplishment in life?" I paused. I could have advertised my exploits and achievements, but I did not. I simply replied, "To have been able to put food on the table."

One of a father's source of gratification, reward, or redemption comes on the day his children realize with heartfelt gratitude what their father has done for them.

Happy and Blessed Father's Day to all my fatherly *brods* out there. And God bless!

## Chapter 21

### Humility in Fatherhood

by Sonny José

In the summer of 2017, my older boy came home from Edinburgh, Scotland, for his annual break from med school. He was twenty-five then, already a full-grown adult, but still rather boyish in his demeanor. He elected to stay in the bachelor's-den-cum-family-room in the basement. Sort of his man cave.

One morning, I came down to use the exercise room. I went into the bathroom and noticed that the water level of the toilet bowl was almost up to the brim. The toilet bowl was clogged. Good thing the water did not spill over onto the carpeted floor. But I also noticed the toilet-paper holder missing. So, I asked Kuya (that is how I call him) what happened to the toilet bowl and where the missing holder was. He could not answer, perhaps too timid to confess to the "mischief" he had committed. I asked again, and he finally admitted that both the holder and the roll of toilet paper flew up in the air and landed right in the bowl when he carelessly pulled from it the previous day.

I asked, "And you did not take it out of the bowl, and simply flushed it into the pit?" He shamefully replied, "Yes." At that moment, he looked like an errant five-year-old child. I shook my head in disbelief, almost ready to scold him with sharp words. But I stopped myself and refrained from doing so. After all, it was an honest and silly mistake, no point castigating him for the error. No need to blow it out of proportion, I thought. And no need to treat him like a little child for he is a grown man now.

So, I instructed him to get the plunger from the garage and told him that we would unclog the toilet bowl together. At that moment, I thought to myself, Sonny, make this a moment that he would remember for the rest of his life. Make this a learning experience for him and for yourself. Show him what it is like to be a man.

A minute passed, and he returned with the plunger and a plastic bag. As he stood behind me, I rolled up my sleeves and began to relate to him a story, an incident with his *lolo* (grandfather).

I slowly dipped my right hand into the toilet bowl and said, "This reminds me of when I was thirteen years old. I used to groom and comb my hair in your *lolo*'s bathroom. I was washing my hand with a new Safeguard soap when the bar slipped from my fingers, flew up in the air and landed right in the toilet bowl." As I spoke, my entire hand and lower arm were snaking inside the hole of the toilet bowl, probing to check if the holder was still stuck within. Then I continued to speak.

"I felt that it would be too gross and yucky to retrieve the bar of soap from the bottom of the pit, so I just left it there. When your *lolo* woke up, he called me to his bathroom and asked if I had dropped the soap in the toilet bowl. And I timidly replied yes. He then said, 'You are not leaving this bathroom until you fish that soap out of the toilet bowl.' I hesitated as it was

disgusting. I asked if the maids could do it for me. He sternly replied, ‘No, you do it with your own hands.’ I cringed in disbelief at what he wanted me to do.”

In the basement bathroom, I could not feel the holder inside the toilet bowl. It was not stuck in there. My right hand could not find it. It perhaps got stuck much deeper inside.

Then I continued, “So, I scooped it up with this same right hand, washed my hand thoroughly with the same bar of soap, and apologized to your *lolo*.” Recalling this story, I felt humbled and thought to myself that I would not inflict the same experience on my son this time.

Failing to find the holder, I asked Kuya to use the plunger and unclog the toilet bowl carefully. Eventually, the water level subsided and went back to normal. He flushed it again, and everything was fine.

That morning, I saved him the embarrassment of what I had to undergo forty-seven years prior with my old man. I realized then that a father’s job is to clean up the mess, even my own children’s mess. Kuya, I noticed, was carefully observing how I would react to the situation he created. I kept my cool. I tried compassion and humility. And, above all, I showed him a father’s love. Not the tough love my old man exacted upon me, but the soft, gentle love that Christ expected of me. In the end, we both came out of it richer and wiser. A father’s role is to set a good example. I did it my way. Hoping that, someday, when his own son drops something in the toilet bowl, he would do the right thing as well.



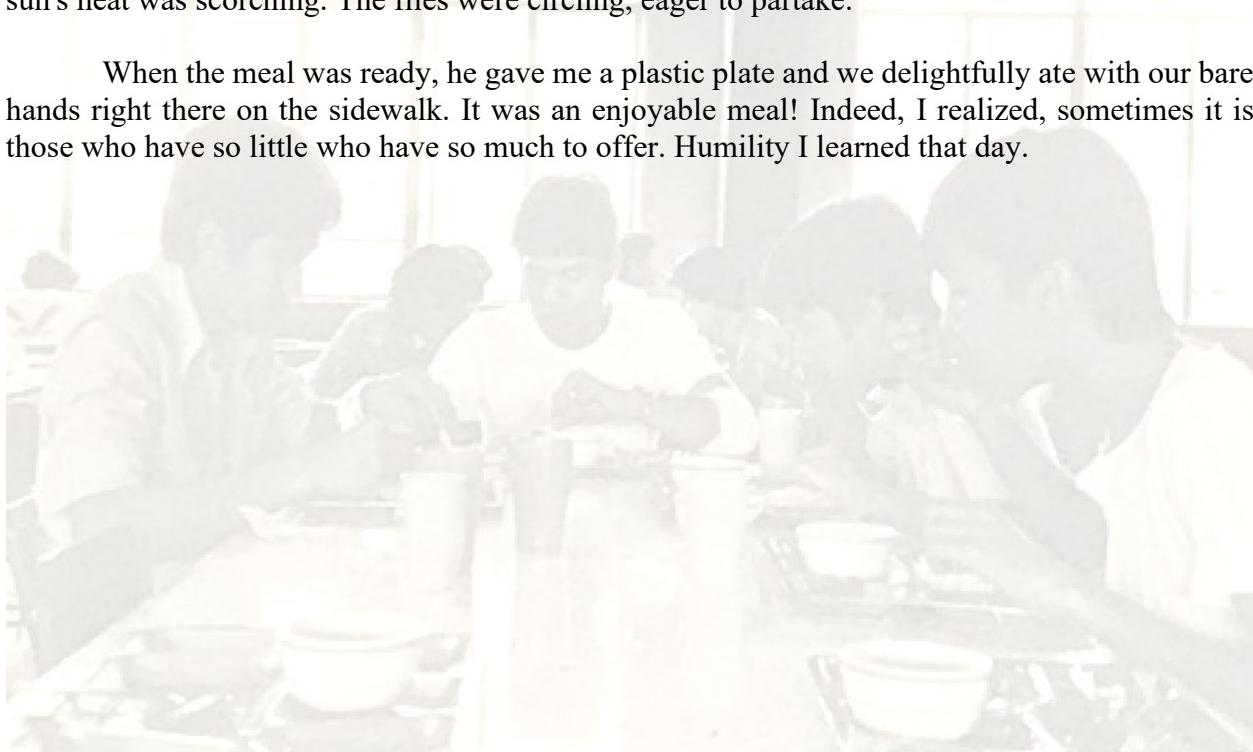
## Chapter 22

### Lunch at a Sidewalk Café

In 1978, on the way to my father's home construction site in Quezon City, the cement-delivery truck driver and I stopped somewhere in Paco for lunch. I asked him to join me for lunch at the *carinderia* (food stall) across the street, my treat. He replied, "*Huwag na lang, sir.*" ("Never mind, Sir, but thanks anyway.") Instead, he invited me to eat with him.

Right there on the sidewalk, he brought out his Bunsen burner and a pot, filled the pot with water from a jug, and cooked rice. He then opened a can of *carne norte* (canned corn beef) and warmed it. Around us, the wind was blowing dust. Passing vehicles were belching fumes. The sun's heat was scorching. The flies were circling, eager to partake.

When the meal was ready, he gave me a plastic plate and we delightfully ate with our bare hands right there on the sidewalk. It was an enjoyable meal! Indeed, I realized, sometimes it is those who have so little who have so much to offer. Humility I learned that day.



## Chapter 23

### Mrs. Patricia Bodkin's Fried Chicken – African Delight

Mrs. Patricia B., our Sierra Leonean housekeeper and cook, prepared fried chicken for dinner tonight. Yum. She says she likes watching Filipino movies (shame on me, she even beats me in patronising our own Filipino films), which by the way are in English. Her impressions: too much drama and crying, often too long, and oh yes...they always have so much food on the table! She asked me, "do Filipinos always eat a lot?" Well, I shall devour the fried chicken she prepared for tonight...

She once met my Pinoy friends who dropped by one noon and brought fresh tilapia. My friends cooked it here at home and she watched them prepare it...and she was treated very nicely by them that she said Pinoy males are very kind, courteous and friendly and know how to cook well. Congrats to Rabby, Henry and Clint...you made a good impression and are such excellent Ambassadors of Goodwill! For that, I am being rewarded with delicious fried chicken...next, I will teach her to prepare tinola, sinigang na baboy, adobo, arroz ala-cubana, lechon kawali, at iba pa...



## Chapter 24

### The Mysterious Lady: A Tale from Rev. Father Damian Temere (of Moshi, Tanzania)

It was pouring hard in Dar es Salaam yesterday afternoon as we hopped off the ferry from Zanzibar. We arrived at almost 6:00 pm. I hastily crossed the street to rush and catch the Holy Mass at the Cathedral right across the street. When I got there, it (actually a wedding) just finished. I approached an African nun at the altar to inquire what time is the English mass tomorrow (Sunday), but she could barely understand me. So, I headed for the foyer to wait out the downpour to subside...then approached an elderly gentleman dressed in a suit if he happens to know what time is tomorrow's service. He said he did not know but offered to inquire inside. So, I stayed by the pew to pray while he headed to the altar. (I should have gone with him, but the nun might be annoyed to see me again if I accompanied him).

After a minute he headed back towards me and said 7:00 am for the Swahili Mass, and followed by the English Mass at 8:30 am. I thanked him for kindly passing me the info. He headed back to church foyer. After a few prayers, I noticed he was still there waiting. I joined him. He struck a conversation asking where I'm from...and I engaged him as I always do when asked that question by strangers. I jokingly dared him to guess. (This conversation-starter trick always works.) First was Chinese, then Japanese, then Korean...then, he finally figured this guy is a Filipino as he goes to a Catholic church. I even tried to educate him by saying actually, the tiny island-nation, Timor-Leste, is also very Catholic because of the Portuguese...but he was not impressed. He knew.

The conversation went to where he was from. I noticed he had a priest's collar (and felt embarrassed that I made him go to the sacristy to find out for me what time tomorrow's masses were). He then introduced himself as Fr Damian. He related that he was just visiting town to officiate his niece's wedding earlier, as he is originally from Moshi, on the foothills of Kilimanjaro. And the dialogue switched to my keen interest to visit and climb Kilimanjaro, but my stint here is too short and the weekends would not allow me to spent 4-6 days to do so. We talked about Serengeti as well and the real Safari, unlike the Kruger/South African experience (a very civilised Safari accessed by tarred roads) into the bushveld. I have heard much about the Tanzanian Safari where the wildlife could be seen in the wide open savannahs, unlike our Kruger experience from a decade past where the animals often hide in the bushes and trees...much harder to find.

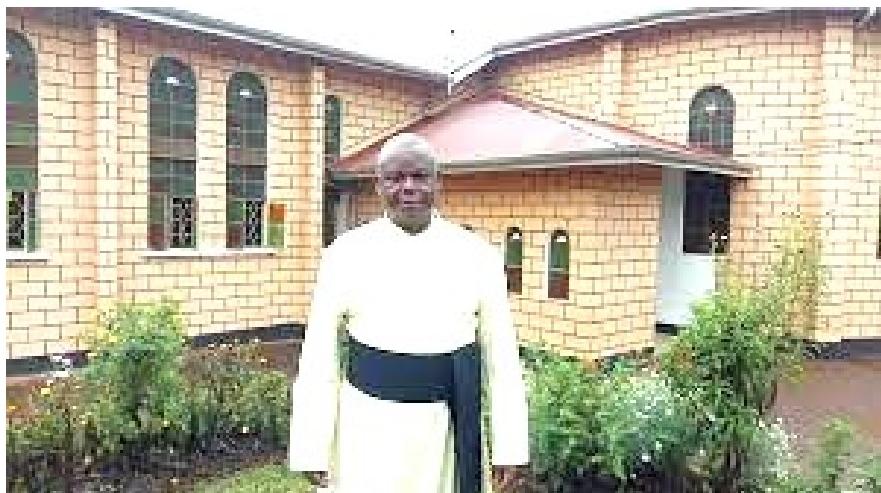
He recounted how Moshi became the most Catholic of cities in Tanzania. He described how Franco-German missionaries started out by obtaining Ethiopian coffee beans in the latter part of the 1800's and started to plant coffee in the lowlands to spread their faith amongst already Christianised Copts. Their efforts did not bear fruit...why convert Copts into Catholicism? So, the padres moved to Yemen hoping their coffee beans would grow and they could set up a mission to convert the Arabs. But yet again met resistance (apostacy is a grave offence for Muslims) and

Yemen is desert country. Coffee needs cool highlands to thrive. The missionaries decided to move back to Africa with their coffee beans landing at Mombasa (Kenya's chief port) and onwards into the interior. The problem this time are man-eating lions, and malaria thwarted their scheme to plant coffee first then convert the natives. Poor padres, where shall they plant their coffee beans, and harvest native souls?

Until they heard about this place located right below the border of Kenya and then-known Tanganyika...a place called Moshi, where the soil is rich, lying on elevated terrain, and the climate perfect for coffee growing. Also, there they met a beautiful lady. They were seduced and never left, he said.

Fr. Damian then asked me what the name of the lady was (this time he dared me to guess). As a good Jesuit-educated Catholic boy, I ventured, "Mary?" Nope. "Magdalene?" Nope. Then who? And he said with a holy smile...Beautiful Kilimanjaro. Who else?

May 2017



## **Chapter 25**

### **Wit versus Humour**

I greeted a lady staff of mine yesterday who was away for three months on stress leave. Said nice to have her back in the office...and how she was missed, and how she is doing. She answered that she is afraid of getting mired in stress again at work. So, I told her next time she is getting stressed...to pause, step away from Stress and give it a finger. We laughed.

This morning, I greeted her and asked how she is feeling and if my advice worked for her. She asked me, "what if it was her boss (me) causing her stress?" We both burst out in laughter...for the next five minutes. That was our stress therapy for the day.

### **Humour and Survival**

This morning was extra challenging coming to work. At -40 Celsius (where the two measures meet, also at -40 Fahrenheit), even the car heater seems to struggle doing its job. To make matters worse, it was 80% foggy all the way, and the roads were quite slippery. How to cope?

- 1) This is an inflection point when driving skills and experience don't matter. One just humbles himself and PRAY. And repeatedly say "please help me, help me, help me" to whoever is Up There.
- 2) Freezing toes? Just pretend playing the piano with your toes...just to keep the blood circulating and pumping down there. The trick seemed to work.
- 3) And the pleasant discovery: you won't smell your fart in extremely cold conditions. Either the mind is so focused on regulating the heat within the body or the olfactory senses also numb out in such bitter coldness.

Conclusion: The Will made friends with Humour. Did 73kms in 74 crisp minutes, safe and sound. Thank Heavens!!!

(N.B. Now I was told by my colleagues to keep the car's engine block heater & battery blanket plugged lest the car won't start later when I leave office. But I left it at home. Then, go down every hour and heat the engine for 15 minutes every time. It is -50 outside now. At least it does not snow in that weather. Whew!)

### **Moonshine over Kilimanjaro and a Taste of East African Humour**

Coming near the end of a long trip from Toronto to cold windy Amsterdam then to rainy Nairobi, and now entering Tanzanian airspace. Through all these years of flying, I never noticed the moon shine over the glossy wing of an airplane until tonight looking out of our Kenya Airways Embraer jet as we cruised over Kilimanjaro below. Then upon reaching an altitude of 35,000 feet, our welcoming captain went on the mic to greet us in a polite Swahili accent and reminded his passengers that smoking is not allowed in the cabin, "although if you wish to do so, you may step out of my plane. Happy Swahili Easter! (Now, I've got to find a way to visit Freddie Mercury's home in Zanzibar.)

## Chapter 26

### Lessons Learned from the Swiss

At age sixty-one, one tends to have many reminiscences and good stories to share.

I recall one incident when my principal (the owner of the company I was then working for) and I were in Geneva to visit the Parly et Cie office, the cashbox of the ultrarich Martini and Rossi family, which at that time just sold their Martini brand to Bacardi for well over a billion dollars.

The family's chief investment officer was a Swiss-German guy married to a Filipina, and his task was to grow the pie for the rich clan and pick investment managers like us to allocate to. We did our usual dog-and-pony show and recited the usual spiel about why he should invest in our stellar-performing hedge fund.

Swiss money managers and private banks do not usually invest with anyone until your fifth or sixth visit, but we got him to invest in our funds on just our second visit. We were able to gain his trust and confidence not just because of our very well performing hedge fund that was delivering a 102 percent ROI during the tech boom. What drew him to us was our answer to his seemingly simple and unusual last question during the investment Q & A presentation.

His question was: What car do you drive? I answered that I drove a Kia Sedona minivan, and my principal said his car was a four-year-old Audi A4, which he bought from our former fund company before it was swallowed up by CI Funds in Canada.

We wondered why he would ask us such a strange, out-of-the-box question. Then he explained that, once, he was visited by a dashing, swanky British investment manager seeking to manage some of the assets of the Swiss family. This British investment manager asked him to come to the window and pointed out his red Ferrari parked down by the road. At that, he faced the British guy and told him that no way would he invest money with him if that is how he handled his own finances.

This is something I learned from the Swiss: They don't care if you wear an Armani suit, expensive Bally shoes, or a Hermès tie. They are not dazzled by brand names and signature clothes or fancy cars. Simplicity and integrity trump appearance. It is how one carries oneself that impresses the Swiss.

At the end of our meeting, the chief investment officer said he would initially send us \$5 million, with more coming later because he liked our low-key approach. I somehow realized also that dedication, passion, talent, and intestinal fortitude help drive business success, not an Ivy League MBA or a PhD in economics. Where there are grit and guts, there will be gain and success.

But above all, a lot of help from Above! As Father Pastor taught us, we own nothing, we are mere stewards of the Lord's wealth here on earth. We are just lent some abilities and given some breaks. So true. So very true. (+A.M.D.G.)

## Chapter 27

### Discovered: Diamond Within Me

by Ellen Diaz

*This is my humble gift to my former Ateneo HS74 students on the occasion of your golden jubilee in 2024.*

As I stepped down the ramp of the plane in Portland, Oregon, after a long trip across the Pacific, I thought to myself, *mahirap makalimutan ang Ateneo*. (It is hard to forget the Ateneo.) This is so because my experience in the Ateneo helped me get settled in America and start a new life as a married woman.

I was amongst the first female teachers in the Ateneo high school (with Cora Salazar, Viring Guinto, Ruth Posio, Raquel Cuadro, and Becky Sañosa) in the summer of 1966. I spent over a decade teaching Pilipino in that boys' school. I vividly remember Viring Guinto visiting our home in Tambo, Parañaque, and speaking with my mother to convince me to teach in the Ateneo. Father Thomas Murphy, then the high school principal, had opened the doors to, and introduced, female teachers to the faculty. It was about time, he said, for our young (teenage) men to learn and respect women (outside of their homes). And this starts with having female teachers as role models and mentors in the high school classroom. I vividly remember Father Murphy. *Makisig na makisig siya* (He is very good-looking.) He looked like the actor Kirk Douglas.

It was understandable that our presence met with some resistance from several male members of the faculty at that time. Why were we having female teachers in an all-boy's school, they asked. This was against long-held tradition. But these boys already had female teachers in their elementary years, and will have them again when they go to college. And besides, times were changing.

I fondly remember Mr. Chito Laygo, who was the head of the Math Department. He always brought me along to attend summer seminars in Bulacan, Baguio, and other places. I used to often help him prepare materials for his math seminars. (We later reunited and met in LA, where he immigrated.) I also became close to Ruth (geometry teacher), Wally Yerro (English), Fr. Dick Croghan (English), and Lilian Verzosa (the librarian).

I remember working under Mr. Onofre "Pagsi" Pagsanghan, the head of the Pilipino Department. My high school students were good in essay writing. But I introduced them to *tanaga*, a form of poetry and the Filipino version of haiku but richer in rhymes. Our *tanaga* exemplifies balance and harmony. It was our first form of literature. Remember this—"Bata batuta, isang perang muta"? I taught my high school students that there are many riches in our culture that we ought to value. *Hindi tayo magpapahuli* (We are never far behind).

We recounted how our Ateneo high school boys were like *chonggos, nagsisigawan* (wild monkeys, shouting in their cage) from behind their classroom windows' steel bars whenever they would see Maryknollers passing by. All the more, when I rode the school bus that plied the Ermita-Parañaque-Makati route—the way those boys would teasingly stare at the Paulinians as our bus passed by my former campus, with the *colegialas* looking back with admiration at my good-

looking Ateneo students. That was perhaps why Father Murphy introduced female teachers, to tame the boys and teach them to behave like gentlemen.

Before moving to the Ateneo, I taught at St. Paul College (Manila), the same institution where I earned my bachelor's degree. I attended an all-girls' school all the way through. Some of my former students were TV personalities, like June Keithly and Becca Godinez. Mother Superior was not very happy about my departure, but I welcomed the new challenge to teach in an exclusive, private school for boys. It was something new and exciting. A brand-new world for me. Besides, the remuneration was better.

I was the only teacher in the Ateneo high school who submitted my handwritten test questions as I did not know how to type. Mr. Ernie Baron, our admin. staff, typed them for me. And in times of emergency, Ruth would kindly type my three-page test questions to meet Mr. Pagsi's submission deadline. Typing was not my forte; I was not really up to the task.

As a new arrival in the States, I exuded a *sige nang sige* (bold and daring attitude) attitude. I immediately skimmed through the job ads and went to downtown Portland to apply in person. Backed by my teaching experience and a belief that I could easily adapt, I applied for a secretarial job at Citicorp Acceptance Company's collection department at Lloyd's Centre. I went to the interview *con todo de postura* (smartly dressed), Manila style. All my officemates were collectors for the mobile homes branch (the other being car loan payments). I had no idea what the position entailed. But I was hired instantly, and my manager did not even bother to ask if I knew how to type. Nevertheless, I felt excited about this new job .

That night, I told Eddie (my new husband), "Let's buy a typewriter." He asked, "How can you be a secretary if you do not know how to type? *Tiyakin mo muna* (make sure first), before we buy a typewriter for you." So, on the weekend, I practiced typing even if I did not know where to position my fingers on the *teclados* (keyboard), and even if I had to do it *tuldok* (with two fingers) style. My new Brother electric typewriter was the key that unlocked the diamond in me.

On my first day at work, I found out that they had provided me with a brand-new office typewriter. My manager was seated right behind me. He brought me a lot of collection letters to type. *Ehem*, I cleared my throat. Two guys seated right across must have noticed I was hesitant to type. Nobody knew I could not type. So, I faked it, and began typing as if I was a pro.

I enrolled in after-work typing classes, paying \$120. I also brought home work, even on Saturdays and Sundays, to catch up and practice typing. Using my crude *tuldok* system, I struggled in the beginning. But then I got better, and better.

As a new immigrant, I struggled with their accents, particularly a collector from Boston and others from the South.

Then, I became employee of the month. I was never late or absent. They feted me with a celebration, with balloons, food, cake. The next month, Leny Diaz was again named employee of the month. The third month, the same. One day, they set me up for a meeting to "compete" with the other department secretary. It was meant to choose which of us to send to the head office in St. Louis, Missouri, to receive an award from the company president. I was selected to fly there alone on a weekend for a one-night, two-day stay, all expenses paid. It was the first time in my life being on my own.

I got close to my co-workers. I became the typist of repute. Ask Leny, she knows everything (especially grammar), they would say. It was no longer all about typing collection

letters. I also honed my reporting skills and stood out. *Bidang-bida si* (star) Leny. I learned how to type, the job was simple, and I was proud of my achievement, being the only Pinoy in the office.

Unfortunately, as they say, all good things must come to an end. After only a year, our Citicorp branch office was suddenly closed, and I was offered a job if I would relocate to the head office in St. Louis. I declined and decided to work closer to home at my husband Eddie's company, a chemical laboratory and factory. My job: chemical factory worker manually capping and sealing bottles of distilled water and cough syrup. It was enjoyable, albeit manual, work. But my supervisor picked on me. Once I cried at work when she bullied me. She singled me out and made me wash the tubes filled with syrup. So, I resigned.

I found another job at Tektronix, a competitor to Intel that manufactured parts for Boeing airplanes and TRW helicopters. I was hired as the personal secretary of Dick Strusan (my department manager). Somehow, God prepared me for this job because, back home, I used to travel daily the long distance from my home in Parañaque to the Ateneo in Quezon City on the school bus. In the States, I left home at 5:00 a.m. each day to go downtown, where I would then transfer to an eastbound bus headed for Tektronix. Eddie took the westbound bus. Eddie, a chemist, was prudent and waited for the right time when we both could afford to buy a bigger home and a car.

Being a *fashionista* (fashion trendsetter) Manileña in America, I continued to dress smartly at Tektronix. But the other secretaries envied me and were jealous that I wore jewelry to work. In Manila, it was customary as a professional to come to work wearing jewelry. If only they knew the reason: our apartment was not in the safest neighborhood. I was fearful burglars would break into our dwelling; hence it was safer to wear my jewelry to work. I would hear their snide remarks, "Diamonds are not for every day." I told my boss, Dick, about this and that I felt out of place. I was also not familiar with the terminologies and technical terms used for airplane parts. Communicating with suppliers was a problem. No training was provided as they simply assumed I had prior experience and understood the reports they wrote. Then, Dick left and was replaced by a female manager named Terry. She was not fond of Dick.

I was also the only Asian on my floor; there were not many Asians then in Portland. And I spoke with an accent. Yes, there was discrimination, particularly by the country bumpkins in Oregon, a lumberjack state. I stood out because I dressed well. I donned different clothes to work each day, and add to that my diamond and sapphire *alajas* (jewellery). I was *posturada* (smartly dressed). In contrast, they came in their jogging pants and T-shirts. Terry and another female colleague were rude and often picked on me. Once, in an office party, they ghosted me. But I could not leave because of the high pay. I lasted in this job for five years, even though it was not a job I desired.

I finally left Tektronix and got a job in Saint Vincent Hospital as secretary to the manager of the dialysis clinic. I was initially hired part time and became a full-time employee before my boss, Gillian Water, departed.

Saint Vincent was a private hospital catering to the affluent. I once met the Tantocos of Rustan's when the old man was a patient then. I looked after two hundred patients and their medical records. It was a totally different atmosphere working with nurses. I regained my self-confidence. It was a much happier place and a much better environment for it evoked my compassion toward patients. It was at Saint Vincent Hospital where I discovered the diamond within me.

I almost got a job in Portland State University located downtown. I thought if I was able to teach boys in the Ateneo, I can teach anywhere. I was invited to teach Pilipino language and history—a new course in linguistics. It would entail library research, which I used to do while at the Ateneo. But I turned it down in the end, even though it offered higher pay and more convenient afternoon and evening class schedules, because I wanted to try something new.

I came to America newly married, in the middle stage of my life, and started from scratch. It was hard to start anew, living in a foreign country, but I swallowed my pride. One would be so lucky if one could get into one's line of profession in a new land. But the hand of God gave me new experiences as well as new trials. I realized there is a path assigned to each person. I confronted personal hurdles and triumphed over my fears. It was a long journey of self-discovery, of learning new things.

Funny that my years of teaching in the Ateneo high school were also years of learning and acquiring precious life skills, lessons, and experience.

First lesson: Adaptability.

We were the pioneering female teachers in the Ateneo high school. I taught all kinds of boys there—poor and well-heeled, the bright and the not so bright (and some who behaved like they knew it all), spoiled, disabled, needy for attention. My Ateneo years provided great preparation for life in America and dealing with people from across all walks of life.

Second lesson: Confidence in myself.

I believed I could do the job, despite the “noise” around us female teachers. Teaching in the Ateneo, I also considered myself a product of the Jesuits. Armed with that background, I confidently sold myself as a “Jesuit product” in my future job interviews.

Third lesson: A teacher can also be taught.

A teacher will always be a teacher, not only in the classroom but also elsewhere and even while in other professions. A teacher is not just a model in the classroom but an example in life. In the process of teaching my boys, they taught me to be an exemplar of respectability, self-discipline, and dedication.

To the young Ateneans, I again impart these humble words: *mahirap makalimutan ang Ateneo*. Ateneo: *siya ang pinaka centro ng magiging future mo*. You may not realize it, *siya ang punla na magdadala sa buhay mo at magpapayabong sa ninanais mo*. *Siya ay isang mistulang tuldok na magbibigay liwanag sa buhay mo, na magdadala sa iyo sa buhay at sa iyong hinaharap*. (Ateneo is the seed that brings you life and make what you desire flourish. Ateneo is like a spark that will light up your life, that will lead you through your life and your future.) You grow in the Ateneo because the Jesuits allow you to enrich your life through new experiences and perspectives. In the end, you will discover the diamond within you . . . just like I discovered the diamond within me.

## **Part 3**

### ***Meanderings and Off the Beaten Track***



## Chapter 28

### Unsolicited Advice: The Devil is in the Details

At some point in time, we all get unsolicited advice and almost all of these are “motherhood statements.” These are statements that we have no choice but to agree with or feel good about the message and the advisor. For example: Do the right thing always. Or, do what is good and avoid what is bad (assuming one can distinguish between good and bad). Anticipate the future. Success is all about burning determination and the need to achieve. Focus on what goals we have set for ourselves in life.

More examples can be heard from the question-and-answer portion of beauty contests, which cover favorite, relevant topics such as climate change, world peace, education, poverty upliftment, and others, with the contestants given very limited time to answer.

I used to watch beauty contests on TV when there was opportunity and time for me after I had finished all my homework. Recently, I was even able to participate in one, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, as a driver for a beauty contestant (who stood beside me and waved to the crowd) in some afternoon parade in Cubao, Quezon City, where the contestants gave the general public or passers-by on the streets a chance for a closer look. A few days later, during coronation night, I watched with eagerness to see whether my passenger would win or at least reach the semi-final round.

In any case, at the end of the day (or at night or even upon waking up in the morning), even if one feels good at hearing all those statements, one also wonders, given the present realities one is actually facing in school or at work, what action or steps to take to achieve these pieces of unsolicited advice.

In short, it is up to the person to figure out for himself what exactly one should do or whether it was worth listening to the advice in the first place. As another popular motherhood statement says “the devil is in the details.”



## Chapter 29

### The Tale of the Driftwood

by Sonny José



I was once descended from a mighty silver birch tree that adorned the banks of the ancient Senqu. I belonged to a family (which you may call a forest) of silver birches that proudly witnessed the cycle of life and the change of seasons. As a branch of this beautiful tree, I stretched out my fingers (my twigs and branches) towards the heavens and the brilliant stars, singing glory to my creator each day that passed, each season, and each year of my benign existence. All these years, I relished the presence of the visiting owls and other singing birds on my arms (my branches) as they kept me company on warm, balmy days as well as on cool, breezy evenings.

One day, lightning struck and cleaved me off the trunk of the silver birch. A sudden gust of wind knocked me to the ground, and I was separated forever from my tree. A heavy downpour ensued, and, gradually, I was washed into the river Senqu. The water was cold and I was entirely soaked. Amidst the shock of my sudden disunion, I began to float into uncertainty, into an unknown essence. As I drifted along the Senqu, I asked myself, will I drown? Will I perish? What about the silver birch from which I came? Will it feel my absence? Thoughts rolled out. I never imagined I would one day float and swim on the mighty Senqu! Thus began my journey . . .

The Senqu was an extremely long river, I had heard from the other silver birches. It stretched beyond the valley from where I used to sit, way beyond the mountains that obscured my view, and beneath my limited horizon. So, I drifted for days, and though the river completely drenched me, it kept me alive. It was a splendid feeling to float along with the tides. One day I was on one side of the river, and then I was tossed, then tumbled onto the other side. Sometimes, I wondered if I would ever see my old silver birch again, only to realize that I was now on my own, in a brave, new world beyond my control. I drifted on.

Then, finally, on a warm, sultry day, I was borne by the tides to the banks of the Senqu, many miles from home. I lay there to dry myself under the sweltering African sun. Again, the question entered my mind. Will I survive; will I die?

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a mighty, handsome bird (which they call an eagle) swooped down and grabbed me with its sharp talons. I thought it would be my end. But instead, we soared up into the air, and it was a magnificent feeling. We landed on top of a gigantic tree. He was building a nest for his kin. Woven into a nest with other twigs and branches, I felt comfort in the warmth of their presence. And so, we awaited the arrival of his partner. That bright, moonlit night, I found myself atop another mighty tree once more, basking in awe at the beauty of the stars and the cosmic realm. It was a wonderful feeling to be able to point up to the heavens again. I was no longer drifting on the Senqu but had become part of an unfolding miracle of life.

That night, the mother eagle laid a few eggs. As weeks passed, several chicks emerged from their shells. In the following months, I witnessed them evolve into eaglets and, later, into strong, beautiful avian beings. I felt heartened that I had been able to give them a home, a shelter, a sanctuary, as I did before to the passing owls and the singing birds. I had kept them from falling off, and was then able to behold the wonder of a budding life unfold right there in the nest. I held them up, until they could soar high in the sky. It was inspiring to see them grow and reach for the heavens. It felt as if I was part of their lives, their life's journey. What bliss, then, to have played a role in this journey and witness their beautiful wings unfurl!

Soon, however, the nest emptied. The family of eagles had moved on to their new nests, and would never come back, leaving me and the other twigs and branches feeling lonely and uncherished. We truly missed our eaglets. And as the seasons passed, we all slowly, inevitably dried up. I could also feel my bones and fibers ache as time elapsed. Perhaps, I thought, I will lie up here to shrivel and pass away into oblivion. The memory of the eagles, however, gladdened me and dispelled these dark thoughts.

One morning, a sudden blow from a falling branch above us caused the nest to come crashing down on the ground. I had felt just like this before, I thought, that time when lightning struck me many years ago. This time, therefore, I was not perturbed. (Experience, it was called.)

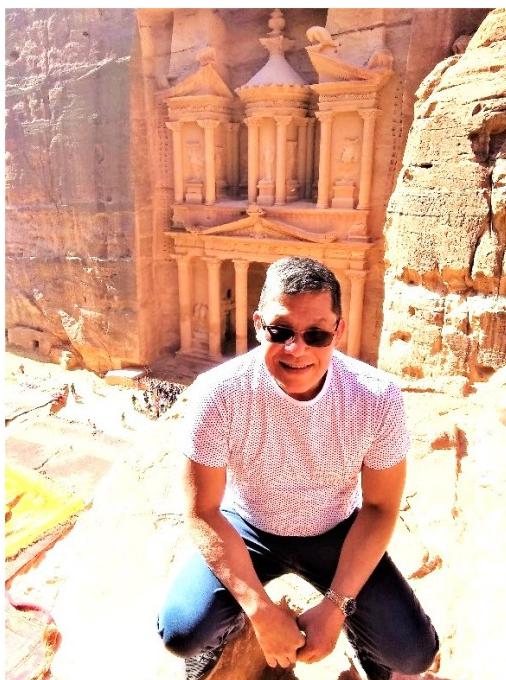
As I lay on the ground and the days slipped away, ants crawled over me. Leaves covered me; but rain washed me anew and kept me moist. I was still alive. And I wondered, what will become of me now, the driftwood that travelled the length of the mighty Senqu?

Summer arrived. I still lay on the ground. I became drier. And drier, and even drier. My skin (my bark) turned from what used to be silver-white in my early days to bronze. I could feel the rot set in. Then one afternoon, I heard the footsteps of some two-legged creatures approaching. By now, the leaves had been blown away, and they saw me plainly, much as the eagle that plucked me from the ground ages ago. A man and his son approached. The curious little boy held me up and showed my shiny bronze bark to his father. I was still straight and a full two feet long. The father nodded approvingly, then took me and shoved me into his sack along with other fallen branches. It was a rather long hike back to their village.

Dusk had set in. I could smell burning wood nearby as they prepared the *braai* for the night. One by one, my fellow branches were tossed into the flame. But the young boy, whom the father called Little Daniel, grabbed me and set me aside. He playfully tossed me into the air and hit me with another stick, until I landed broken into two pieces, one longer than the other. His father summoned him to bring the longer piece to fuel the fire. My longer half was pitched in with the rest of the branches that helped cook their meal that night. Just as I provided the eagles a home, a shelter, a sanctuary, that night I provided the boy and his father fire for their sustenance. I pondered, was this going to be my end?

However, Little Daniel slipped my shorter half into his pocket as a keepsake. That same night, he stored me in a bookcase in his warm, cozy abode. He kept me there with his baby books and coins and little globe. In my company, too, were his headphones, his mini trophies, his little leprechaun doll named Tiny Tim, his pens ,and his empty diary.

Many years went by and Little Daniel grew up to be a fine young man. He left for school and after a few years returned home. One day, inspecting his bookcase, he found me there crammed in a corner beside Tiny Tim. As he started to clear his old stuff, tossing some into a bin, he lifted me up but then instead gently lay me down on his desk beside a long slender filament that he used for writing. And into a tiny, hollow cavity that marked one of my ends, he inserted the thin tube and transformed me into a wonderful new pen! Beside me lay his empty diary, which he began to fill that night. As he burned the midnight oil, I kept him in quiet company while I rested upon his warm, gliding fingers. I discovered the life of this bright, young lad and the wondrous chapters he has lived. In the same way that I had seen the eaglets soar powerfully up in the sky, I witnessed this boy grow as well—his struggles and pains, his triumphs and accomplishments, his dreams and aspirations revealed—as, using the remains of this old, brittle, and once-discarded driftwood, he scribbled down the inspiring story of a young man's flight.



## Chapter 30

### A Call to Prayer

I took an assignment as country manager of an Oslo-based NGO in Freetown, Sierra Leone, early in December 2015. This was a country that was ranked fifth lowest in the continent according to the United Nations Human Development Index, though every international aid agency and numerous NGOs thrived in this forlorn corner of West Africa. It was by far my worst hardship post—unbelievably, malaria was then still a scourge in the densely populated capital of two million souls—but its saving grace, for me, was the perfect coexistence and harmony I found amongst the followers of Mohammad, Christ, and the animists.

On Christmas morning at dawn—it must have been around 5:00 a.m.—I was awakened by a man reciting prayers outside the house. It was Komba, the evening watchman, fulfilling his *Fajr*, the pre-dawn Muslim prayer and prostration. Simultaneously, the rooster began crowing at the top of his lungs while all around the birds tweeted and sang merrily, signaling the arrival of a new day and as if calling me as well to prayer.

So, as was usual, I performed the *metania*, something learned from the Egyptian Copts and which desert monks have practiced since early Christian times, and that which the Prophet Mohammed had also incorporated into his spiritual routine. Three times, in sequence, I bowed, kneeled, and prostrated myself to welcome another fine day, and then followed this up with *matins*. It felt good to start the day with an open, contrite heart, quietly joining Komba, praying outside, to offer another day to the Lord.

At 7:50 p.m., I observed Komba at his post doing another round of prayers as he prepared for his night watch. He was a quiet man, unlike Musa, the younger kid on day watch. There was something fascinating (or, rather, intriguing) in his movements and gestures, as he reverently prostrated himself before his Creator to welcome each new day, and then again later in the day, when the sun departed and the silence of the night set in.

It was humbling to witness a simple man, an “uneducated” ex-soldier-turned-night watchman, exhibit his solemn faith and surrender to his Creator. From this simple Muslim soldier, I learned the significance of humility, constancy, and devotion, reminding me of an Orthodox priest named Cosmas, who preached that salvation hinges on two things: humility and true repentance.



## Chapter 31

### A Christmas Memory: Remembering Ate Chuling and Junior By Sonny José

It is the Christmas season, the start of Simbang Gabi, or Misa de Gallo, a Christmas tradition in the Philippines, and as I am browsing through albums of old photos of my childhood days, memories of Ate Chuling and her son, Junior, cross my mind.

Both mother and child lived in the service of my family when my siblings and I were kids. They were, and still are, a part of me. If Christmas is supposed to be a season of giving and serving others, these two beloved souls, to me, personified the Mother and Child that ushered in the first Christmas and embodied the true meaning of the season.

Ate Chuling was an Ilocana from Pangasinan. As I recall, she was a widow of a fallen Korean war vet and had sought shelter, and subsequently employment, with my parents in Manila. So, I reckon she had been there even before I came into this world. She was, initially, my older brother Nelson's and younger sister Edna's *yaya* (nanny), while her younger sister, Juliana, was mine and my youngest sister Rubi's. As *yayas*, Ate Chuling and Juliana were like our junior mothers, sort of, as my mother was a busy physician, always on the go.

Ate Chuling later became our family *cocinera* (cook) when we came of age and could take care of ourselves. I remember her *pinakbet* (a vegetable dish) and *ginisang munggo* (mung bean soup —they were to die for. No wonder that I was an overweight, 106-pound boy at age eight—blame it on Ate Chuling's culinary tricks, especially her *adobo sa* liver spread and *adobo sa piña*. But she wasn't just an excellent cook, she was also innovative. Once, when we ran out of instant coffee and my mom was not home to give her the cash to buy the coffee, she boiled burnt rice left over in the *caldero* (cooking pot) and produced instant coffee—a trick she said she learned during the Japanese occupation in World War II, those years of hardship.

Ate Chuling had only one child, whom she named Camilo Sison, Jr., or Junior. Junior was maybe a couple of years older than my big sister Marian. While Nelson and I were growing up, it just seemed that Junior had been around forever. He was always there, even during those summer processions of Our Lady, fiesta or no fiesta, with candles alight. He was a fixture in the house. Errand boy, car washer (yes, our *chofers*—drivers—were a privileged bunch when Junior was around). Junior would also buy the *pan de sal* (bread roll) early in the morning, our *hopia* (filled, flaky pastry) for *merienda* (snack), and just about anything you wanted him to. He was the guy in charge of buying the *puto bumbong* and the charcoal-broiled *bibingka* (type of rice cake), enriched with salted eggs and cheese, near Espiritu Santo Church at five in the morning, just in time for my and my siblings' breakfast, while Ate Chuling prepared the hot cocoa, the *sinangag sa bawang* (garlic rice), fried eggs, and *longanisa* (a type of sausage) for those who woke up late to find themselves deprived of *puto* and *bibingka*, no thanks to me and the *puto bumbong* gang.

Junior grew up with us and, with my mom's financial sponsorship and help, attended public schools through high school. We did not really treat him like a servant; he was more like an older, surrogate brother to Nelson and me.

He taught us how to fly the *sarangola* (kites) and lace the thread with *bubog* mixed with *condensada* milk (small fragments of glass mixed with condensed milk), gearing for kite fights in the sky. He taught Nelson and me to play street-side *tumbang preso*, *patintero*, *luksong tinik*, and even *piko* (Filipino, childhood games) with the girls. He and Nelson would also sometimes take a dip in the *kangkungan*, a local swamp where *kangkong* (water spinach) thrived. Until my mom—much to her consternation, the water there being brackish and a breeding ground for mosquitoes—heard about it (not from me, but from gossipy neighbors), and they got a scolding. I was too weak-hearted to join them and just watched while they had their fun; but, well, they were the big boys and could get away with that stuff, while I was not yet in their league. I guess boys will be boys.

Junior was also an accomplice to our mischief. He would accompany us to “steal” *caimito* (star apple) and *mangga* (mango) from Mang Catalino’s orchard, only for us to be chased by the old grump with a bolo in hand as we ran for our lives. (Mang Catalino was the gardener of my little sister’s godparent, who lived next door to my *lola*’s (grandmother) house in Kusang Loob, Santa Cruz, Manila.) I recall at age eleven or twelve, Nelson asked Junior to buy cigarettes for him and me—Marlboro, the real man’s brand—from Mang Pitong’s *sari-sari* store (small neighborhood store selling sundries) next door to our house, unbeknownst, of course, to my strict mother and father. To this day, the three of us have kept this a fraternal secret from my parents.

During summer vacations, when my cousins would stay with us in our Tayabas home (rather, summer camp), Nelson would collect change from each of us from whatever was left of our allowance so we could ask Junior to sneak out of the house to go to Blumentritt and clandestinely buy us our much anticipated and “illegal” midnight feast from a nearby Chinese *carinderia* (food stall)—*pancit miki* or *pancit shanghai* (noodle dishes) wrapped in banana leaves, *pan de sal*, *mamon* (sponge cake), and a few bottles of Sarsi. My parents forbade us to eat food from “unsanitary sources,” so we waited for the old folks to go to bed, then let the party begin—held at the third-floor veranda, away from their snoring presence. That was such “burpy” fun, doing things behind the oldies’ backs. Up to now, I marvel at how we were able to keep that a secret from my old folks, and how we were able to get away with the “crime.”

Junior was the man! During those hot, balmy summer nights, we would appoint him to be our guest zombie in our game of *multo-multohan*. He would always willingly oblige. He must have enjoyed scaring us. He would cover his dark brown face with thick talcum powder, turn his eyelids inside out, shroud himself like a ghost with an old, white blanket, and start chasing us in the dark. While we hid and he sought, we were careful not to get caught because whoever he caught would be his victim and prisoner. One can just imagine the riot, commotion, and noise we created, causing a rumbling and shaking, so that my mom would have to send one of the maids upstairs to warn us and order us to stop. It was just good, innocent fun, and Junior was the star of the show! Up to now, when I recall those summer fright nights, I smile in appreciation, that we had Junior to entertain us. Those were halcyon days, without smart phones, internet, and all our modern-day gadgetry.

When Junior got older and entered into manhood, he joined the Philippine Army around 1973. I have not heard from him since. All I know is that he married and had children, and Ate Chuling, who eventually left our home to return to the province, commenced her second stint as *yaya* to his kids.

Somehow, I miss them both. I waited for them to show up at my mom's and dad's wakes, but I reckon news never reached them. I wonder where they are now. God bless their humble souls.

As another Christmas approaches, I think about the mother and child, and the service they had rendered to my family. I reckon that was a gift of grace from them to us. I think, too, about the Madonna and Child and the gift that was Christ to mankind.



## Chapter 32

### A Father-and-Son Talk Under the Stars

In March of 2016, my Pinoy friends and I spent a fun weekend at Bureh Beach, Sierra Leone. There, I met Alpha, a young, West African lad who took care of our group—from pitching a large tent, lighting up a bonfire, cooking lobster for dinner, to generally watching over our safety—a perfect host and superb guest relations officer.

Near midnight, my five friends retired to our tent. I, however, opted to sleep right under the (what seemed to me) millions of stars. Approaching sixty years of age, I do not get to do this often anymore (and I’m envious of kids in their twenties), especially in today’s busy work-a-day world. It was a breezy evening on the beach, with no mosquitoes around, as I formed a small mound of sand into a pillow. Doing away with the creature comforts, and experiencing nature at its best—the beautiful beach surrounded by majestic mountains, a river flowing out into the sea, perfectly cloudless heavens sparkling with myriad of stars . . . yeah, it was just like one huge garden of flowery stars—what else could one ask for? It was a perfect chance to commune with one’s Creator.

As night crept in, Alpha, our twenty-two-year-old “babysitter,” hung around the bonfire acting as watchman, along with the four village dogs, including Sixto, the cross-eyed, native Sierra Leonean husky (actually, an *asong kalye*). It was as if Alpha had anointed himself protector and felt a personal responsibility to watch over us, to defend us, just in case.

At midnight, I began to meditate under the stars whilst facing the vast Atlantic. Alpha, observant and watchful, stayed close to his bonfire, curious perhaps as to what this strange Asian guy was doing. Alone in the dark, I relished the experience of witnessing the spectacle of the ageless cosmos unfold right before me, with an occasional shooting star passing by, on which I made my personal wishes. I was suddenly reminded of David of the Bible story—a simple shepherd boy who slew Goliath and became King of Israel—alone in the fields tending to his flock in the cold dark night. Feeling like the world had forgotten him, and that there were only him and his Creator, alone yet together.

As I lay there with my face turned up to the stars, Alpha kept circling round, checking for any electronic gadgets (yes, those intrusive, pricey smart phones) that may have been left behind by my Pinoy friends, who had retired to our tent earlier. He prompted me to bring them inside the tent, and I did. Then, I advised him to retire and go get some sleep. But he lingered on, as if wanting to chat. I had the feeling he wanted to sleep on the beach as well, with the dogs—for, yes, the four canines had encircled my blanket—so, I allowed him to recline on the other side of the sheet.

I asked Alpha what his plans were in life. He said he wanted to complete his high school education and maybe go to college, if his limited resources would permit. He wished to pursue accountancy or maybe train for a skill to enable him to earn and matriculate at the same time. I asked about his parents, and this was where the conversation turned more serious and rather heartbreaking.

He told me his mother was still alive and that he had moved in with her. He said that he was the eldest of his siblings, who all had different fathers, but that he had never met his own dad, never knew him, never got to touch him, or speak to him. Not even once. He was told his father died in 2008. I felt very sorry for him. I asked how it was like not to have one. And he replied, with a sad look in his eyes, “I feel very empty and lonely.” I felt his hurt cut right into his very being, as he bared his soul to me. At that precise moment, I also realized how blessed I was to have had been gifted with a wonderful father. So, I sighed very deeply and implored the stars above to provide me with some guiding words for this lonely, but determined, kid. I was quietly pleading for even any words of comfort and solace, and, if God chose to give me a bonus, perhaps some inspiring thoughts as well to light up his spirit, his searching soul.

Uhm, I think God heard my frantic prayer, and words came streaming out of my lips. Thank heavens, because if I could only help this lad even change his sad perspective on life, I thought that would be good enough to earn my redemption and salvation. That night, I may have found a new spiritual “son” to mentor and to guide.

Imagine, then, the scene: two versions of David—the young shepherd boy and the wiser, elderly man in the twilight of his life—talking. One still in the fields finding his way through life, and another in his sunset years, yearning to show the way to the other.

I told Alpha (who is Christian) that, even if he was not blessed to have a father here and now, the One Up There has always been, and will always be, around, just waiting for his call. He *does* have a Father, as all of us do.

I encouraged Alpha to talk to Him, to see each star up there as an angel waiting to hear, and listen to, our call. (As a little boy, I always liked to gaze at the stars, and that is how I view them in a more profound way.) Beyond those stars, the Father awaits. Just call out to Him; and when he calls, to open his heart, his purest desires and wishes, and offer them to the Father—not necessarily a word or a thought, but the purest of intent and one’s own heart’s essence and yearning. He listens, He waits, and He already knows even before we are even born what is in our hearts.

Then, like a father relating a timeless story to a young son, one asking about life and its puzzles, I recounted to Alpha the story of David, a powerful figure in the Bible, and conveyed to him that even underdogs can become heroes.

Next, I related to him how in life one meets angels, mentors, and guides and told him how grateful I was to those I was fortunate enough to have met. One picked me from obscurity and mentored me in the United Nations Development Program in Southern Africa, another gifted me with a graduate fellowship in Madison, Wisconsin, and another gave me a rare and much-desired career break in Canada.

Finally, I invited Alpha to join me in solemn quietude and prayer. No words were uttered, but I imagined a beam of light from our respective hearts shooting up to the stars above, pushing them up even farther into the realm of our Father.

I felt blessed to have had this rare chat in the dark with a young man looking, perhaps, for more meaning in life. I hoped I had inspired him. And I ended by telling him not to give up on his dreams, and that someday, when he became a father himself, to never forget our conversation that one starry night.

As the night got colder, I huddled on the sand awaiting the dawn, thankful for this encounter.

Alpha and I have kept in touch. He has been to the US at least thrice. He had found some benevolent benefactors (former Peace Corps volunteers who learned surfing from him) who sponsored his trips. From surfing in Bureh Beach, he has now learned to ski in the snowy slopes of Utah and Montana. Indeed, angels do exist and God does answer prayers.



## Chapter 33

### A Father's Advice to a Son: The Power of an Idea by Sonny José

Back in March 1994, my parents traveled to Toronto to witness the [birth](#) of our younger son, Bindoy. They stayed with us for a month. During their visit, I had the chance to have a serious father-son talk with my old man. I whined about how, as a new immigrant in Canada, I was finding it difficult to get a decent job befitting my skills, education, and international experience. At that time, I was stuck in a low-paying job—first in data entry, then in the call center—in Trimark Funds, the second-largest and fastest-rising mutual fund firm. I lamented what a waste it was of my skills, talents, and education to be trapped in a menial job when I had had more substantive positions previously as an economist at the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, and the New York City mayor's office. And now here I was doing this boring stuff just to eke out a living. An absolute waste of time, I felt, when I thought I was worth more. How was I to get out of that rut, I asked him.

He listened while seated on the sofa. Quietly. Intently. Calmly. Reverently. Patiently. Yes, that was my old man. Always sympathetically listening to, and not pre-judging, his junior.

Then, he finally spoke and imparted to me what would turn out to be a most precious advice to a son, a troubled breadwinner and the struggling head of a young family and one who was engulfed in frustration.

“You know your strengths, son. You have master’s degrees and Ivy League credentials from the best Philippine schools and Wisconsin, right? You have worked overseas and can blend well with foreign cultures and with foreigners, right? You are good in economics and finance, right? You can speak three languages, right? You write well, right? You are a fighter and never give up, right? Okay, here is what you can do. Think of an idea. Create one. Study it, research it, package it, finesse it, then present it. Write a memo to the president of the company, and see what happens.”

Wow, I thought, that was quite a vague and open-ended tip. Where the heck would I pluck this idea from? From a tree? From thin air? From a trash bin?

“Think. An idea will come,” he said.

Three months later, my family (including four-month-old infant Bindoy and *Kuya*, his big brother) visited Manila for our annual summer vacation. In that visit, we made side trips to Hong Kong and Shenzhen, China, with my in-laws. At that time, the Far East was booming. Cranes everywhere, meaning lots of tall skyscrapers being built. If you looked around **360 degrees**, chances are you would have spotted skyscrapers on the rise. In Manila, in Hong Kong, in Shenzhen, (then a booming city of two million, transformed from being a sleepy town of barely **20,000** inhabitants only twenty years prior). These places were simply burgeoning and growing

economically and financially by leaps and bounds. Affluence was in the air. Remember the term “Tiger Economies”?

Upon returning to Manila, still feeling jet lagged, I woke up early, at three or four in the morning. Little Bindoy was crying and hungry. My wife was fast asleep, tired from nursing our baby late into the night. So, I got up, prepared some milk, lifted Bindoy from the crib, sat on a rocking chair, and bottle-fed him. As I rocked him—**Zing!** An idea suddenly came to me!

Why not offer our mutual funds in the Far East, establish the first Canadian mutual fund presence in the booming Far East! I could lead that initiative, I thought. After all, I am an educated Asian and know the region well enough. I know the boys in Manila. I grew up there.

When we got back to Toronto, I wrote an email to the recently hired executive vice-president (EVP) of the company and reported to him my “findings from the Far East.” The EVP, David, was the former president of **Loblaw**s, the creator of the President’s Choice brand, and worked for the wealthy Westons, considered the Rothschilds of Canada. He was a graduate of Oxford and had taken his MBA in Stanford.

I did not think anything would come of my email and so was surprised when, a couple of days later, I received a call from Odette, the company president and David’s executive assistant, asking me to come upstairs. David had apparently read my email and wanted to meet me.

I noticed he had a strong resemblance to the young Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, and Michael Caine, the British actor. As he invited me to take a seat, he told me, “I read your email and like your idea. What on earth are you doing downstairs?” I told him I was in client service, in the call center. Then he said, “Starting Monday, I want you to move up here. You will report to Michael, one of my senior VPs, and I want you to go to the Far East with him and study the market for as long as you need. You will be an analyst and will spearhead Trimark’s offshore expansion thrust.” He then asked how much I was making, then added that, starting Monday, I was going to be paid double my current salary. I found out later that he had immigrated with his wife to Canada with barely \$500 in his pocket. Perhaps, I surmised, he understood the struggles I was undergoing as an immigrant, as he had gone through them himself. David literally paved the way for me in the investment management world, and I shall never forget him.

To cut the long story short, I visited the Far East, then Dublin and Luxembourg, then Bermuda several times. At the end of my stint at Trimark Funds, I left as a director. Later, I became the managing director of a hedge fund (investment management) company in Barbados.

With a single, solitary idea, the course of my life changed, and the world became my oyster.

I still keep in mind my old man’s words on that quiet evening in Toronto: “Think of an idea, create one, study it, research it, package it, finesse it, then present it.” It is, for me, a most valuable piece of advice passed on from father to son. I never thought my email would be taken seriously. But I always remember my father’s advice. And the family traits that run in our veins—honesty, integrity, and industry.

Thanks, Papa, for your simple, yet priceless, advice that opened many doors for me. I love you.



## Chapter 34

### A Quiet Reflection on Getting Old

During the twilight years of my parents, I pondered how they felt about being old and grey, if they experienced loneliness, isolation, and helplessness due to their frailty. If they harbored any unease in their hearts from the nagging feeling that they are no longer needed by those they love and the society that they once were a part of, a common, though unspoken, sentiment of people their age.

This is probably why some old people end up using their wealth as leverage to secure attention and loyalty from their kin and peers. Others, on the other hand, provoke guilt in their loved ones to extract respect and obedience from them. Whether in the East or the West, modern, progressive societies have also evolved a utilitarian view towards their elders in exchange for pensions, Medicare, and social security. Modern day societies have transferred the responsibility of taking care of their elders to the State, hence was created the welfare state. Sometimes, the elderly are also treated as “has-beens,” not unlike worn-out rugs and outmoded appliances, just waiting for the time they would be discarded. Even a young Canadian millennial I know refers to the senior citizen’s home as “the warehouse.” I was shocked!

Ironically, in the two-and-a-half months I spent serving as CFO in Carcross, a Yukon First Nation, I learned that in traditional indigenous societies, including Carcross, their elders are treated with reverence and respect and regarded as fountains of wisdom and guidance and whom the youth look up to. Also, in micro-societies like these, often plagued by alcoholism, drug use, welfare dependence, suicide, and the generational abuse of kids suffered at the hands of servants of the Church (the religious who run the ignominious residential schools), the willingness of the citizens to forgive those who had transgressed them as a people has transformed them into elders blessed with compassion and from whom the youth learn by example. Somehow because their elders were victims of the residential school system, they have gradually learned to forgive the sins of the colonial past, albeit forgetful of the pain inflicted on their generation. The indignity (in other words, hardships and suffering) they endured has morphed into wisdom and reconciliation in old age.

Perhaps from the First Nations elders and their traditional societies. we (in here, I mean both the First Nation elders, their traditional societies and also us – the general society of non-FN elders), despite the alienation and creeping dehumanisation brought about by modern day technology, the tired and spent products (soon to be the “rejects”) of a modern, progressive culture still have something noble to learn (or re-learn)—that life is really a circle.

A circle, life is, for our journey ends at where it commenced. From nothing, we became something. And from something, we shall become nothing. Life is but a journey called experience. But the elders possess a jewel that society could really treasure—their expertise on life, wisdom, understanding, and love (one rooted in sharing and serving others).

Now I somewhat understand how it is to grow old with meaning, as my parents, aunts and uncles did. Living meaningful lives through old age, every elder still holds a trump card. Not the wealth and knowledge they shall bequeath but the wisdom they exude and impart. I know for I strove to grow and learn from their wisdom, just as I have witnessed how the First Nations value their elderly. Perhaps we need not wait for old age to arrive to espouse and live these virtues they have generously passed on to us.

Just some musings from a junior elder (at age sixty). Now, enjoy my time to wash the car, get some groceries, press some clothes, take a nice hike by the nature trail, and go to church at 5:00 p.m., while I still physically can. Someday, I may struggle to do this stuff.

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### **About chess and life...**

While having breakfast with 2 friends one Saturday morning, the discussion veered towards chess. I seized upon the topic and curiously asked my breakfast pals: if they were each a piece in a chess set, what piece would they like to be?

One answered, “a rook, a knight or a bishop for they are the powers behind...”

The other (a Deputy Minister) in all his sophist revelry replied, “the chessboard.”

To which I said, “you want to be the trampling ground of the elephants?”

Then, I thought: if there is a thing called rebirth, I'd rather be born a pawn, then a rook, then a knight, then a bishop, then a queen, then a king. Then, I would have gained mastery of life. Oh, and then, as a chessboard, too. That would be neat.

## Chapter 35

### Giving > Receiving

Approaching Christmas in 2017, in my first year serving Carcross/Tagish First Nation in the Yukon, my payroll officer, Dinah, approached me in my office to ask what I wish to do with my comp time (or management compensation for extra hours worked). I was surprised she inquired as I seemed to have accumulated a lot of hours on top of vacation leaves. I said, “why did you ask?” She replied, “because Andrea (your predecessor) used to cash them out at year-end.”

I said, “I do not wish to get cash for it. Could I just transfer my extra hours to them, our Finance staff?” She responded, “I don’t think you could do that.” Then she uttered with an impish smile, “but you could cash it out and give it to us.” So, I agreed and told her, “but first let me seek Michelle’s (Executive Director) or Chief Andy’s approval if I could do that.” And sent the former an email. Michelle approved of the scheme.

So, I instructed Dinah to prepare the cheque, deduct the taxes, and I shall encash it and gift each of our Finance staff a little Christmas bonus for the holidays. But she was instructed not to disclose where it came from, just say that it came from the Finance Department. That was our little Christmas Santa secret.

Then, I thought was I being compulsive? An inner voice whispered, “you could have used that to lavish your wife and sons nice Christmas presents, or have the ugly, cracked windshield in my new SUV replaced with a brand new one, or treat myself to a nice new timepiece, or this, or that, or go here or there...” But the Christmas spirit prevailed. A silent voice whispered, “you do all that, and you just made one person happy. Besides, your family is already well provided, and you are very amply paid and financially secure. You gift them the comp time, and you will make 10 souls and their loved ones happy, too. Remember Old Scrooge?”

Malinda, our payables clerk, could not even muster the \$250 to pay the fine and reclaim her suspended driver’s licence. Rita, a single mom, is always short in meeting the needs of her 3 children. Dinah, likewise, whose partner is unemployed, and may well not afford to buy her young daughter a new dress or a toy for Christmas. Josie struggles to even meet her rent or pay her dentist. Maybe Joyner could spare some help for his parents abroad. The others were a bit better off, but would be delighted to feel appreciated.

In the end, the softer voice prevailed. Each received a Christmas card from Dinah (with the present hidden within) at the end of our group glassblowing activity and Christmas lunch in Whitehorse.

We really felt good. Simply giving back to the First Nation for the opportunity to serve. Blessings => Gratitude => Sharing => Giving => Blessings. We fulfilled a perpetual chain in an eternally repeating cycle. It all began on Christmas day when the little child was borne, and came Joy to the World!

## Chapter 36

### An Early Christmas Story by Sonny José

It was a long flight to Tel Aviv that November 5th, 2019, and the tired pilgrims were not accorded any rest when Dr. Hani Shahadeh, an Anglican Bishop who was also our tour guide, promptly bused us all out to Jerusalem. It was going to be a long, tiring day getting introduced to the cradle of our faith where it all began twenty centuries ago, but the excitement was building.

Before dusk, we crossed into the West Bank and into the busy town of Bethlehem. We were greeted at the “border” by Israeli guards, very polite kids with Uzis hanging by straps on their shoulders.

I had been waiting for this trip all of my life. Even as a little boy, I daydreamed about seeing the place where the bright star shone on that one special night when the Saviour was born. But . . . it was not a scene to behold. The little town was now a bustling city with crowded buildings and shops everywhere; and, as the bus slowly rolled onto the premises of a huge Byzantine cathedral, the Church of the Nativity, we saw crowds swarming the edifice. It looked like Baclaran on a Wednesday. Tourists—or, rather, pilgrims—waited with eager curiosity and anticipation of what there was to see.

Then, Dr. Hani prompted us to join the queue and warned us that it was going to be an hour-long wait. We entered the basilica from the northwest end and slowly, patiently, inch-by-inch, flowed with the crowds in a U-turn to reach the northeast end of the church. By the entrance to the basement chapel, the line froze and the bottleneck began. We could not get in. There was a group of middle-aged Polish pilgrims reciting the Rosary in their native tongue before us. Behind us, some Africans were complaining about why they were blocking the entrance. As we finally began to descend the short flight of stairs, I told Baba, a widowed, seventy-eight-year-old Serbian travel mate, to rest her hands on my shoulders, realising she was very tired standing in line the past hour or so.

The bottleneck occurred because each pilgrim down at the crypt, or cave, is given thirty seconds to pay homage. This tiny cave in the basement, underneath the cathedral's altar, is the site of our Saviour's birth and is where hordes of pilgrims converge to show reverence to Him, not any different from the shepherd boys and the three Magi who traversed the deserts to also humbly pay their respects that one special night.

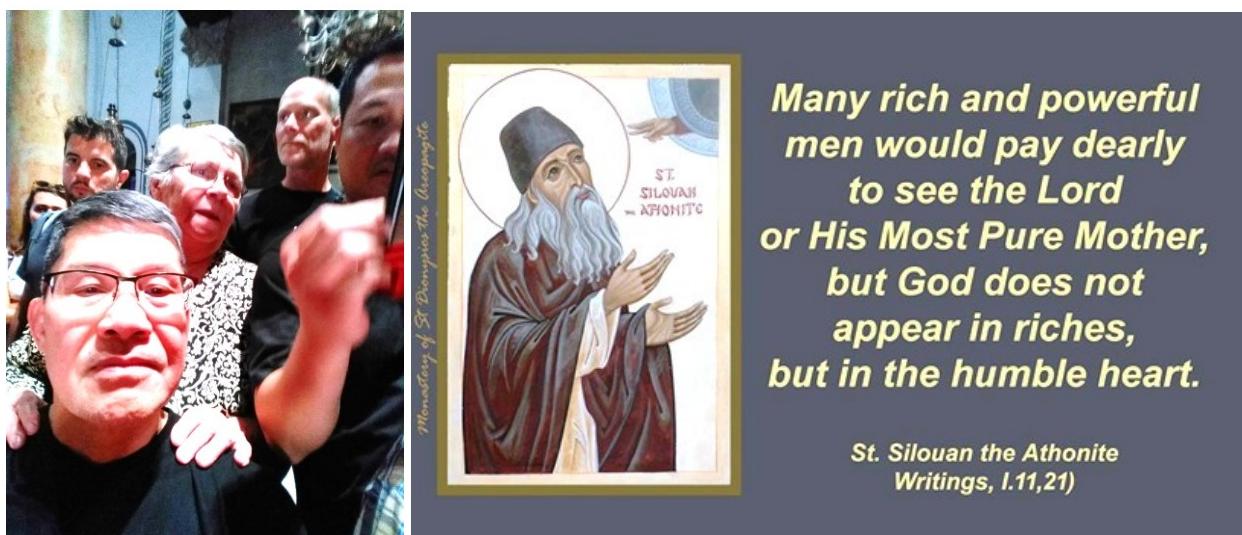
We were told to go in pairs, so Baba and I approached the spot where He was born. There was actually no crib of hay, no manger, but a star embedded on the marble floor, called the Star of Bethlehem. The set-up reminded me more of a simple fireplace, not the sometimes-elaborate *beléns* (nativity sets) which we all grew up with. I remember when I was ten, Nelson, my big brother, made a cave-like dwelling out of *papier maché*, spray painted it with earth colors, and put our mother's *belén* inside. And, oh, he did not forget to hang a bright, shining star above, with rays of light extending down to illuminate the scene. This family tradition evolved into a boyhood

fascination and a desire to visit the birthplace of Christianity and one day set foot on the ancient pathways that Christ Himself walked.

When my turn came, I did the *metania* (knelt, prostrated, and kissed the Star of Bethlehem), then uttered, in a childlike, heartfelt manner, the Jesus Prayer: “Jesus, my Kinsman, my Brother, my Friend, my Saviour, my Redeemer, my Teacher, my Master, my Lord, and my God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I stood up and realized that I had finally, at sixty-two years old, fulfilled a boyhood dream. I sighed, filled with the peace of Christ.

It was in the Ateneo and during my early boyhood years when the importance of Christmas enkindled in me faith in Christ, and that faith has been kept alive—despite life’s twists and turns, its tosses and tumbles, its many detours. Faith is never lost. Though it may be cast aside, in the end we come around and return to rediscover it. Maybe it was that same lingering faith that inspired this boy’s dream to become reality and lead the way to a pilgrimage of thanksgiving, rediscovery, and reconnection with the Almighty. In a way, Christmas kept that flame of faith alive in me.



Baba and me waiting at the steps leading to the basement chapel



The long-awaited moment: prostrating at the birthplace of Christ



Leaving the basement chapel



Church of the Nativity at night

## Chapter 37

### Choosing and Playing Life's Games

by Sonny José

Life has a funny way of teaching us lessons through the people we meet and sometimes in the strangest of places. Life is also about making choices, choosing the paths we take or the games we play, and making sure we play them well.

I was twenty-seven years old in 1984, when the political and economic system in the Philippines was near collapse after Ninoy Aquino was assassinated the year prior. Inflation was raging at 50 percent, with the Marcoses clinging on to the last vestiges of power after almost two decades of decadence, plunder, and corruption. The country was a sinking ship and, like mice abandoning ship, many of my peers and classmates fled to the States legally or illegally to escape. Many found their way into US and British universities to pursue graduate studies hoping to restart their careers abroad as there seemed to be no hope in sight, thanks to Ferdinand and Imelda. If only today's generation could envision that diaspora, which was the only option then for young professionals like us.

I wanted to study abroad, anywhere, just so I could get out of this sinkhole. Manchester offered admission, so did Stockholm, Georgia, Drew (New Jersey), and a few more. But I did not have the financial means to pay my way. Many of my Ateneo and UP classmates were lucky to have rich dads and were blessed with high IQs as well. Not me. One school offered a half-tuition scholarship and part-time campus employment, but still not enough to fund graduate school and the whole works. It would have cost me a lot to pay those application fees without any guarantee of admission, much more securing a financial aid package to attend grad school.

One thing, though, I was sure of—a graduate degree from an American or European university would surely open doors and lots of possibilities.

I was resolved and determined. But then things got gloomy, and gloomier. The dream seemed to be losing its lustre, the possibilities looked to be fading, or, maybe, reality began to set in. Maybe it was time to let go and forget about my dream. Maybe it was not meant to be.

Amidst all the uncertainty, I explored other options. If I could not study abroad, perhaps I could work abroad and save some funds to be able to get into grad school at a later time. It is all a matter of chance and timing, I thought.

First came word about a possible assignment in Tonga (somewhere out there in the South Pacific). Then, at the same time, came news about another possible overseas posting in Zambia (sandwiched between South and Central Africa), rich in copper and malaria. However, like a dark horse grabbing the limelight, a firm offer from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) also came my way to relocate and work in Lesotho, that tiny mountain kingdom in the sky surrounded on all corners by apartheid-controlled South Africa.

Lesotho beckoned. While others went to Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, the UNDP wanted me there. But Africa, the dark continent? An uncle advised me to think of it this way: You are going to a frontier land. It may be remote and faraway, but the environment there is clean and sterile, and absent are the social disparity and economic mess prevalent in the Philippines, on the brink of a national disaster. Count the blessings, I was told. So, I reframed my mindset.

And I psyched myself the Confucian way: One step backward is two steps forward. I may have had to sacrifice my grad school aspirations, but now I had the chance to explore new paths in life. And, I reckoned, the UN will open new doors for me. And indeed, it did.

This was my first stint abroad. The flight was long—we stopped for a day in Hong Kong, did some shopping in Kowloon; had a brief stop in Colombo, where I bought some tea as pasalubong (gift) for Madame Bessie (wife of Bani Aguirre, my dear UNDP mentor and guardian angel); then another refuelling stop in Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, after which we hovered over the huge island of Madagascar, my first glimpse of Africa; landed in Jan Smuts in Johannesburg, then hopped on a smaller plane to Lesotho. There, I was met warmly by Bani, Bessie, and a cohort of Filipino expats. It made my transition easier. Homesickness was never a challenge. I felt instantly at home in Lesotho.

As an expat, I was given a flat in the centre of Maseru, the capital, right in the heart of a city of 50,000 souls. The place was called Letsie Flats, a popular residence for young professionals, expats, and diplomats. Among them was Oleg Khodyrev, a twenty-five-year-old staff of the Soviet Embassy (as it was known then), the chargé d'affaires to the Soviet ambassador. The Soviet Embassy was situated right behind Letsie Flats, housed in an imposing white mansion with an impressive horseshoe-shaped driveway leading up to the front door of the grand edifice. One would wonder, why would the Soviet Union have a huge embassy in the middle of a poor country surrounded by apartheid South Africa? A listening post perhaps (for the Communist Chinese and North Koreans also have a presence in that tiny kingdom in the sky in avowed resistance to the apartheid regime in its bigger neighbour). Strategic plans to supplant the apartheid regime in RSA, a country with a stranglehold on diamond mining, as well as gold and other important minerals. RSA is the jewel of Africa, the richest in the continent. After all, the Soviets have already bagged Angola to the west and Mozambique to the east. And Ethiopia, at the Horn of Africa. South Africa was just a matter of time, if their cards were played right.

Oleg lived on the fourth floor of our apartment building, in a corner flat diagonal from my corner flat, and we always bumped into each other as we used a common stairway. Oleg was as close to a Renaissance man as you can get, by Soviet standards. Tall, lean but athletic, well-dressed, confident, extremely friendly and, as we would say, muy simpatico (a charismatic dude). I thought to myself that maybe part of his job description was to network and make friends, or maybe he was just naturally amiable. I would always have cordial and warm encounters with him, as we had common friends on the same floor, including Chris Williams, a British bloke from Cambridge who arrived in Lesotho with only a couple pair of trousers, a minimalist yet brainy guy, and Ronan, an Irish friend. (I had somehow developed rapport and camaraderie with the British and Irish guys as all three of us were in a week-long cultural orientation course in Roma, the university town outside Maseru.) We were all young bachelors, out to discover the world.

As an aside, Chris Williams once jokingly asked why I spoke like an American. I retorted, maybe because that was how the American Jesuits taught us (in the Ateneo), and maybe, too, because the Philippines was once a US colony and we were constantly bombarded by US news and TV shows. I asked him why the interest. And he replied, “That is not English.” Then what was it? He replied, “That is rubbish.” That was my first cross-cultural encounter with the British superiority complex or, rather, cultural eccentricity. But Chris and I always got along well. Keeping an open mind always helps.

Oleg was a different beast. Always smiling and always reaching out. We got along well, too. And because he had that boyish charm, my Filipina friend, Eleanor (who taught children in a mission school in Leribe, about an hour north of Maseru), developed a crush on him and implored me to introduce her to Oleg, which I did. They must have clicked because, one day, I came home for lunch and was told by my maid, Madame Martina, that Eleanor was in town and was looking for me. When I got to the fourth floor, I saw, across from my flat, Eleanor and Oleg in a tight hug (presumably, I had arrived too late for the kissing part).

Oleg occasionally invited us for drinks in his flat. Drinking is to a Russian as singing karaoke is to a Filipino. Hence, I refined my drinking skills with the help and tutelage of Oleg. One afternoon, before my departure for the US, he invited us for some drinks. While we awaited the arrival of Chris and Ronan, he brought out a bottle of vodka. Then the lesson began. He said the typical vodka known in the West—the classic Stolichnaya and the made-famous-by-James-Bond Smirnoff—were not real vodka. They sort of belong to the mold of what is known as Russian vodka. Russian vodka is for tourists and beginners. The real vodka is the Soviet vodka, he said. Here, Sonny, this is the real vodka. He poured it in a glass. Then, he retrieved another bottle from the cupboard. Inside was a brownish liquid. This is balsam, Sonny, he explained with an impish smile. I will mix it with the vodka. You will enjoy it. And, surprisingly, I did.

After a few rounds, the other two arrived. The evening got more interesting when the topic of conversation veered towards the superiority of the socialist model and how capitalism’s days were numbered. Later in the night, a young Basotho lady named Rosemarie arrived dressed in camouflage uniform, denoting she was with the Lesotho Army. She said she had just returned from training in East Germany (then part of the Soviet bloc). I later heard that she was the daughter of Gen. Justin Lekhanya, the military supremo who deposed the anti-apartheid prime minister Leabua Jonathan (by order of the South African powerbrokers in Pretoria) in a live coup, which I witnessed in 1986.

I was already tipsy and drunk, and I had to leave at dawn for my early morning flight to Johannesburg the same day. It was a very nice evening. It was fun, especially so with Oleg and the guys, and more so after I relieved my stomach of the toxic delight called the Soviet-vodka-plus-balsam mix. I cannot even recall how I made it back to the flat, either I crawled on all fours or managed to just carefully keep my balance along the way.

But I had an assignment from Oleg, rather, a friendly favour to fulfill. He asked me to buy him a pair of Levi’s jeans and a denim jacket in the States. In Moscow, at that time, this was like owning an Armani—a status symbol in an egalitarian communist paradise. I bought these items and mailed them to him in Lesotho.

The friendship turned a page, and somehow contact was lost over the years. I finished my graduate studies in Madison, Wisconsin, worked for seven years in the East Coast—Annapolis and Baltimore; Washington, DC; and New York City—and re-domiciled my young family in Toronto, Canada, in 1992. Oleg, the interesting, young diplomat who hailed from the Caucasus, likely moved on to a few more foreign assignments.

Fast forward to 2021. Today's technology certainly makes it easier to reconnect with the past. One would never expect that people we met almost four decades ago could now be contacted—thanks to LinkedIn and other branches of social media—and, as a consequence, old friendships can be rekindled.

I reminisced about my fun years in Lesotho, my first foreign assignment outside the motherland. I wondered about Oleg so I Googled his name and chanced upon an article and a photo. I found this: Oleg Khodyrev, Chief of Staff of the Russian Security Council. My good, old friend had grown much older and statelier. I was impressed. He had gone places—from being a mere aide to the ambassador—as I did—from being a low-paid UN worker to becoming a managing director of an offshore hedge fund firm, for one thing. We had each chosen and played life's games, taking risks and reaping the rewards as well as the consequences, and we both have come a long way from where we first began.

I searched for Oleg's name in LinkedIn and managed to get a generic office email. I sent him a message and, early this June (2021), he responded, writing: I'll be glad to exchange news about everything!!! I've been thinking about our time in Maseru. So, stay in touch. Best regards, Oleg.

Time to reconnect with an old Russian buddy, and maybe go through a few more rounds of Soviet-vodka-plus-balsam with him. Perhaps with his boss, Vlad Putin. Hopefully and maybe sometime soon.



Comrade Oleg today



Oleg, the Man

## Chapter 38

### Grace

Joel Lopa recently asked me, “write about the beauty of God’s grace.”

Me?

Am I even qualified to delve into this topic? Neither a theologian nor a virtuous man am I.

*Grace is defined as the divine influence which operates in humans to regenerate and sanctify, to inspire virtuous impulses, and to impart strength to endure trial and resist temptation; and as an individual virtue or excellence of divine origin. In Western Christian theology, grace is the help given to us by God because God desires us to have it, not necessarily because of anything we have done to earn it. Then there are the five graces, referring to an Eastern concept — the five graces of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Each needs to be honored in the full experience of life. But a third and simple way to explain grace is that it is an expression of God’s mercy. That last one, I could somehow understand because it is simple and straightforward. And at its core, mercy is forgiveness.* (Source: Wikipedia)

In occasional moments of solitude and meditation, a voice in the wind whispers: ***Each one is given three cups to fill and offer to the Lord. This perhaps could earn us salvation and forgiveness, and if in luck, experience God’s grace.***

1. **The cup of gratitude.** Anything that comes one’s way – be it good or ill – there is always room and reason to be grateful. The fun side of life, the flip side, and even the unexpected curve ball. Simply be grateful, for gratitude enriches the soul...always. As with each breath we take.
2. Then there is **the cup of forgiveness and compassion.** For the harm we have caused, or done to us, and also to share with and understand the misery and condition of others.
3. And the last is **the cup of pain and sorrow.** For events and situations that break one’s heart, pierces one’s soul, and crushes one’s self. For to become a sage and earn a transcendent spirit, one has to experience and bear pain and sorrow. As they become unbearable, the only option is to offer it back to the Lord.

Therefore, in life’s journey, in order to witness the beauty of God’s grace and mercy, each cup must be offered solely or entirely to our Creator -- to venerate, to consecrate and to prostrate in humility and total surrender.

Perhaps one way of witnessing the beauty and splendour of God’s grace.

## Chapter 39

### A Christmas Tale: The Story of Mohamed Bokhari, The Helper by Sonny José

*Gratitude. Hope. Charity. Struggle. Survival. Reunion. Rebirth. Service. Redemption. Blessed.*

What is the right word? I am still searching, waiting for it to come.

For two long years I have been struggling to find the right frame of mind, the right words, the right moment to write this story. It haunts, it compels, it inspires; and I promised Mohamed I shall one day do it for him. When? Finally, now, after fourteen long pages of scribbled notes, his story. I wish I can do justice to his harrowing, sad, yet inspiring, story.

#### Introduction

It was the Christmas of 2015 when Mohamed sat down with me in the living room of the Revenue Development Foundation staff house in Freetown, Sierra Leone. He always liked to be in the company of expats, as if it elevated him from the rest. He worked as our gardener and cleaner, and also ironed our clothes. He made sure there was water in our two huge reservoirs. His purpose in life, it seemed, was to serve and to share even whatever little he had. Before arriving in Freetown, I was told by Klaus, my Danish colleague, that Mohamed was a sweet person, a character, and that he would do anything to please everyone. But he also warned me to never allow Mohamed to cook our meals because Patricia, the better cook, would get jealous of the attention. He and Patricia got along well like siblings, though, as long as he kept away from satisfying our culinary cravings.

Mohamed was also a friend, a good one; and here is his story.

On the second of February 1973, at 10:00 a.m., in the village of Koidu, Kono District, Desmond was born. Jonathan Bokhari, his Muslim father, worked as a security guard (as staff sergeant) in NDMC, a diamond-mining company located in the West African hinterlands up north. Mbalu Bokhari, Desmond's mother, was not only a housewife, but also traded in clothing. Desmond was the second child among a brood of three brothers and three sisters.

At age five, he was sent to a nearby primary school run by Christian missionaries. In Sierra Leone, Muslim kids were sent to mission schools to obtain a better education, learn the Our Father, even those of Muslim parentage. His was a mixed school, where students were taught to pray Christian as well as Muslim orisons. Such is the Sierra Leonean way—Christians and Muslims co-exist in peace.

Perhaps Desmond was the name his father conceived for his son, so he could gain admission to a Christian school. (His father was a practical and wise man.) Desmond liked English and literature, but was not fond of math. He was an honor student. In school, he enjoyed sports, both track and long-distance running. At age thirteen, upon entering Form 1 in high school (the

entrance exams of which he passed on his first try), his name was changed to Mohamed. He felt bad when his father asked him to use the name Mohamed. Abandoning the name Desmond meant, for him, leaving behind his pleasant childhood. Little did he know that the change of name to Mohamed would coincidentally portend a sinister change in his life as well when, indeed, his life was suddenly upended.

## The Civil War

Desmond, the boy, became Mohamed, the young man. At age fifteen or sixteen, halfway through secondary school, he was forced to stop at Form 3 when the civil war broke out. The civil war, which lasted from 1991 to 2002, was not born from religious strife. Instead, it was born from greed, with the rebels fighting for control of the diamond (trade?) in order to seize political power.

The war forced him to escape the village for Kono, where his old man sent him to another school. His father always emphasized the value of education, even amidst the turmoil of the civil war. This move caused him to be separated from his family for twelve long years. The village started emptying out as well. His parents escaped to neighboring Guinea in the end.

Mohamed did not know this. As the rebels approached Kono, everyone escaped to save their own lives. The rebels were feared. Young boys were kidnapped, held hostage, and converted into child soldiers. Refusal meant drastic measures inflicted on the kids. The options given to the refuseniks were: short sleeve or long sleeve? "Short sleeve" meant your wrist was cut off. "Long sleeve" meant say goodbye to your entire arm. The more unfortunate ones even had both legs severed from the knee down. Such horrific brutality. An uncle of Mohamed's died in the civil war, executed by the rebels.

## The Escape

As the rebels approached, Mohamed and others fled on foot. He slept in the bushes. Sometimes, for two weeks, he would go without eating. Some folks would occasionally feed him. He was determined to get to Freetown, a safer haven still controlled by government forces, no matter that it would, in the end, take him six months to get there. The fear of being captured and forcibly recruited by the rebels prodded him and other young men and boys to flee as far and as fast as they could. At times, he would argue with fleeing friends on which direction to go.

Kono is 270 miles from Freetown, through harsh terrain and jungles. Sometimes they would be stuck in a place for a day or two, fearful of sounding off the rebels. They survived in the jungles by eating cassava (from old abandoned farms), eating them raw. It was miserable. Hunger pangs. Sickness and exhaustion. Malaria. Body pains. Swollen feet. Just thinking of surviving another day because, if found in the bush, they would get killed or, at the very least, accused of spying.

There were four of them in the group, all strangers who just met along the way. Survival dictated that they learn to trust each other. Or, should he?

So, Mohamed chose his own destination. Religion did not matter on the trip. Abu Kamara, Suleiman and Issa went with him to Makeni.

In Makeni, there was a thick air of distrust both for government forces and the rebels. Nobody trusted anybody. Even people in the villages they passed distrusted them. They might well be rebel informants. They elected to stay in the center of town to be visible. Rebels do not do that.

In Makeni, the relatives of Abu Kamara began to cry when they saw Mohamed. They thought everyone in Kono was dead. They were anxious to know about his family, and he was taken to the chief for questioning. That night, they hardly slept. People continued to ask lots of questions about him. They considered him a risk. Even when he had to relieve himself, two men had to escort him. Food and water were provided by the villagers, but Mohamed could not eat after months of depravity. His throat felt scratchy and he could not swallow.

Mohamed told them his destination was Freetown. Abu had a cousin who owned a small business near Waterloo, in the outskirts of the capital, and Abu directed him to this relative.

### **Twelve Years in the Desert**

From Makeni, it took Mohamed a week to get to Freetown. Careful to proceed, he sometimes journeyed on; sometimes he simply stayed put. No one trusted each other in the bush and on the road, and he never made friends with the people he travelled with. There were lots of checkpoints approaching Freetown. At the checkpoints, the soldiers did not treat refugees well. The government forces looked for tattoos and skin marks. Often, they were asked to remove their clothes. If they saw bush marks, they were questioned more, suspected to be rebels infiltrating the capital.

Exhausted, Mohamed finally reached Waterloo and met Ibrahim, the cousin of Abu Kamara. He was a tall fellow, the same age as him. At the Waterloo junction, different fruits, agricultural produce, fish, fowl, and livestock, were brought in from the provinces. There, Mohamed helped Ibrahim in his business, buying and selling produce. He prepared fish and cassava bread, sold food in the market, and earned a small salary, living below the poverty line.

Mohamed lived with Ibrahim for a year, while he tried to know the whereabouts of his relatives. But Mohamed had more ambition than just sitting around and waiting to sell fish. He could not stay in Waterloo. So, he eventually inched his way into the capital, hoping to get educated and to improve his life in the big city. Eventually, he ended up as a construction worker earning a smaller income, just enough to survive for two days for a week's worth of work. For ten years, he lived in Freetown doing construction work, barely feeding himself, living in an unfinished building, paying rent for an unfinished room made of plyboard and cardboard, with a pit for a toilet.

Mohamed's struggles persisted. But he thought, I am a survivor; I can surmount this.

One day, he was surprised to see a former neighbor of his from Koidu. He expressed his wish to find his family, whom he had not seen in over twelve years since he left home on his father's prodding. His old neighbor had good news for Mohamed. His family was alive and living in a refugee camp in Guinea. The old neighbor, as it so happened, worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Mohamed thought twelve years have gone by until he came to hear about the fate of his family. Everything became so remote to his now. The damage that this war had inflicted on him, his life, his family...all that is irretrievable, irreparable, irreversible now. Mohamed's heart sank when he heard they all thought Mohamed was dead.

For ten years, he had lived in Freetown doing construction work, barely feeding himself, living in an unfinished building at Spur Road not far from our staff house. Squatting in an unfinished structure, he paid rent for an unfinished room made of plyboard and cardboard, for which he paid Leones 8,000 a month (about US\$1.10). It had a pit hole toilet where he can wash but have to cover himself.

The civil war lasted twelve years. At its end, Mohamed heard that NGOs were arriving to help. His old neighbor recommended that he work in a compound where the British Department for International Development (DfID) helped displaced persons. He found a job as a gardener working for a Lebanese, even if he possessed no skill or experience in gardening. The Lebanese ended up hiring him to help renovate a house in a lamentable state, later to be rented out to an NGO. There he met guests from DfID, particularly Alistair Wood from Scotland, who was working as an anti-corruption expert after the war. Mohamed was employed by Wood. This time, he was paid a bigger monthly salary and provided accommodation in the male servant's quarter, where he was even furnished with a foam mattress! He remained under Wood's employ for two-and-a-half years until his contract expired. Wood even contributed money to Mohamed to help him find his family in Guinea.

### **Reunion and Resurrection**

That day, Mohamed left early in the morning. It took him two days to travel to Conakry, Guinea. And another 3 days to search his family. He visited 3 camps until he encountered someone he knew. She hardly recognised Mohamed at first. Then, she led Mohamed to his family. The female friend, from childhood days, was surprised to see Mohamed as if she saw Christ resurrected. She recognised him only from her childhood memory. It has been long ago...

They went to the camp to find his parents' hut. At Cinkonia Refugee Camp, Guinea. Mohamed asked her to stay back and wait for him as he had to first obtain a pass to enter this camp. Then, Mohamed, in his boyish mischief, asked her to stay back again just to see if his family could recognise him.

He walked towards the door, then knocked. He stood right by the door. He waited for this moment for over 12 years. He was nervous. He wanted to surprise them. Then, Mbalu (his mother) opened the door.

Mohamed greeted her, "Good morning 'mam. I am looking for a friend. I lost this friend going to Makeni twelve years ago."

Mbalu asked, "What is your name, young man?"

He said, “My name is Abu Kamara; would you know where I may find Mohamed Bokhari?”

Mbalu raised her eyes up in the sky trying to recall who this Abu was. Then she looked at Mohamed’s face, her eyes fixed at his eyes, smiling, “Son, where are you coming from, I cannot recall who is Abu, my son’s friend?”

Jonathan, his father, heard the discussion. He came out. He did not look healthy.

Jonathan came closer looking at his son’s friend’s face. Then realisation crept in...with much surprise, finally declared to Mbalu, “Woman, this is our son, Mohamed. I remember his polite voice.”

In disbelief, Mbalu said, “What?”

Then Jonathan called him by his name three times, “Desmond? Desmond? Desmond!”

Immediately he answered, “Yes, Father.” His father came forward like a hunter who saw a deer that he wanted to grab, and hugged him tightly. ‘My son, my son, how are you?’

Mbalu in excitement joined in, “Is he really the one?” She immediately dashed to call his sisters, and people came to see their long-lost son, declaring loudly, “Come, my son is not dead, he is alive! Come see him!”

His gleeful father shouted, “Oh my son, how did you manage to survive?”

That evening, all the siblings were there. They thought Mohamed was dead. He felt sorry for them, he told him mom. For twelve years, without them, Mohamed was not happy...he felt a void in his heart. The whole evening, he recounted his journey, his very long journey...now he is back home.

His mother uttered, “Mohamed Mamowise, bless that boy.”

The war was already over. They were waiting for the UNHCR to repatriate them back to Sierra Leone. Processing takes time.

## **Service and Charity**

Mohamed spent years helping his family. Sometimes, he had to endure starvation in order to send them money, as he continues to do for his mother, Mbalu. He could not even think of going back to school, to continue his education that had been disrupted by war.

“To help one’s parents is a blessing.” This is what they were taught in Africa. And Mohamed has always been grateful for the chance to serve others and share of himself.

“Live honestly and, wherever employed, uphold honesty and hard work,” Mohamed told me. Indeed, I had often left my wallet stashed with cash atop the drawer, and he nor Patricia would even touch it. They were, indeed, a trustworthy team.

## **The Ugly Scars of War**

Mohamed misses his family. Feels heartbroken and alone. Regretful that war had separated them all. War had destroyed his home life, taking a toll even on his married life.

His first wife was Nancy, with whom he had one child, David. She would go out at night, saying she was praying and fasting. At times, she would say she was going to visit relatives, but was found to be playing (fooling around?) with other men. She was always asking for money. Although she worked as a housemaid, she refused to share her earnings with Mohamed, who was likewise helping out his relatives in the provinces. When he became broke, she left him. David was two years old when they separated, but has since joined him as he has become more financially responsible.

Eliza was his second wife. Terry, baptized a Christian, is his son with Eliza. Eliza sold food from a small restaurant to workers in the area. But Eliza also left Mohamed because her parents wanted her to go to college. He was left with two boys to support. David stays with Mohamed, while young Terry lives with Mohamed's mother, Mbalu, in the province.

He said his wives were jealous of his helping his parents and siblings. Sometimes Mohamed had to help them quietly.

Now, he has Fridia, his twenty-seven-year-old Muslim girlfriend who takes care of David

## **Afterword**

Here is the story of a boy deprived of his youth because of war, separated from his family, and forced to survive in the bush. Eventually, however, he found his niche in the world not as a glorified professional, but as a humble worker—a cleaner, a gardener, a handyman, a servant.

He always greeted me in a courteous, cheerful manner every morning. Even if he was not feeling well, he still came to work with a positive outlook. Uneducated, low skilled, living in the slums of Freetown, he still managed to accommodate our watchman, Musa, by offering him space in his home when Musa was asked to leave his father's home by a new stepmother. He offered refuge to another struggling soul, who made not even half his earnings.

Once, the strap of my flip flop broke, so I asked him to buy me a new pair. Mohamed came back that afternoon with a new pair, plus my old flip flop fixed by a shoe repairman. On another occasion, the shoulder strap of my briefcase broke. He offered to have it fixed for less than a dollar! How could I not love this guy? He draws his strength and inspiration from being of service to others.

What man could be bigger than that?

I write this story in honor of my friend and co-worker, Mohamed Bokhari. I am blessed and honored to have met him in this life. And I hope I have immortalized his life story for others to understand the real purpose of man on earth. Mohamed was a simple man with a good soul.



## Chapter 40

### A brush with a wise old man...

In 1986, as I stood in the passport control line at what was then known as Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg, I noticed an older, Black gentleman in front of me. He was dressed like a pastor, wearing what seemed like a Roman collar, and had a younger companion with him.

As we approached the stern-looking Afrikaner passport control officer, there seemed to be a mood of quiet tension in the air. The officer scrutinized the gentleman's travel document then, finally, firmly stamped it. I peeked at the old man's passport and distinctly remember his birthdate: October 7, 1931.

In the silence of the room, I could sense a feeling of quiet tension and awe amongst those behind me in the line. I looked closer at the name on the gentleman's passport and read "Desmond Tutu." Yes, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient, on his way to Hong Kong, right there before me. The man who, in apartheid South Africa, taught South Africans that within every man is the limitless capacity to hope, to forgive, and to heal despite the pain and cruelty that a man could inflict on his fellow man—that Desmond Tutu. It was my closest brush ever with a renowned social justice warrior and world figure, a true man of peace.

These words from one of his books, *The Book of Forgiving*, has always resonated with me.

*There are days when I wish I could erase all the horrors that I have witnessed from my mind. It seems that there is no end to the creative ways we humans can find to hurt each other and no end to the reasons we feel justified in doing so. There is also no end to the human capacity for healing. In each of us, there is an innate ability to create joy out of suffering, to find hope in the most hopeless of situations, and to heal any relationship that is in need of healing.*

This fleeting encounter also had me thinking that, sometimes, in life, we desire to be with people much bigger and better than us. Sometimes, we aspire and even crave to be in the company of such personages. But we often take for granted and fail to recognize that that person may be, all along, just standing right beside us.

## Chapter 41

### A Trip to China: A Boy's First Impression

Travel, they say, opens one's eyes to the arts and culture, architecture, cuisine, and the mundane. Here is one precious insight from a young boy on his first visit to China.

In 2004, my family of four and my in-laws went to Shanghai. We made a side trip to Hangzhou by train to visit Steve and Tess Warren and my three-year old goddaughter, Tia, our old family friends in Barbados. Steve found an expat job as Head Chef at the newly-opened Howard Johnson Oriental Hotel.

"Hangzhou is noted for its dreamy West Lake panoramas and fabulously green hills. Eulogised by poets and applauded by emperors, the lake has intoxicated the Chinese imagination for aeons." (Lonely Planet)

We accorded ourselves some luxury and bought first-class tickets for everyone. There were no speed trains serving the 202 kms route then. Midway through the trip, I had the urgent need to pass water. Upon closing the bathroom door, I noticed the toilet seat was missing only to realise there was only the traditional squat toilet. I thought this would be a curiosity for my little boy. When, I returned to my coach, I dared Bindoy, my 10 year old son, to go to the toilet and find out for himself what I discovered. So, he eagerly took off to do likewise.

After a few minutes, he came back to his seat. I asked him what he found out. Then, he confidently declared with an impish smile, "I just saw the Great Hole of China!"

Indeed it was.

## Chapter 42

### The last 400 kms to home...a journey of 5,500 kms across Canada

When I was driving alone in the past 3 days (Saskatoon-Winnipeg-Thunder Bay, Ont. -- each 700-800 kms apart with so limited amount of daylight this time of year, and really struggling to keep barely awake, I prayed (the Rosary repeatedly), and I told God I am just so helpless but have to keep moving lest darkness catches up on me (because I don't drive well in the dark)...somehow, I felt I was not really alone. I had no choice, just kept driving and staying awake and alive.

The first part (Whitehorse-Watson Lake-Liard Hot Springs-Fort Nelson) was of immensely breath-taking beauty, but on the flip side -- it was slippery and tricky driving on eternally winding snow covered mountain passes at -30 below. If the car broke down, I am really toast. Perseverance was put to test. Occasionally though, I was blessed to see buffalos, reindeer, and elk.

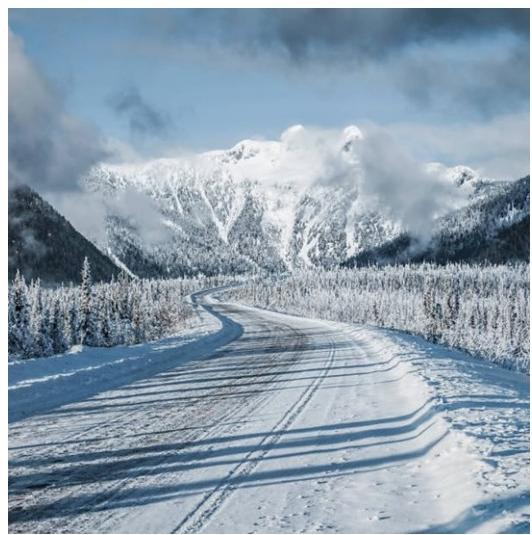
In the Prairies, it was flat and endless -- but it was predictable and more fun to drive. I felt like a Nascar race driver for once. I pushed the pedal to a speed of 150 at times. Fortitude and patience – with caution -- were on test.

The previous day, upon entering Ontario along the scenic Canadian Shield route -- Kenora to Thunder Bay -- I was greeted by snowy blizzard-like conditions, with eternal road salt sprinkled on my windshield (with dwindling supply of windshield wiper liquid), snail pace traffic on those winding snowy roads, and slow moving trailers pelting pebbles on my muddy windshield. Yet again, darkness was about to set in. This time, it was a test of will -- so near and yet so far.

If asked, which I prefer? The mountain passes brought out my helplessness in the face of the Creator and nature. The Prairies brought out the feeling of God's grace after the frigid mountain ordeal (from Yukon down to the Northern BC Rockies). And the first Ontario lap is to test determination armed by His guiding hand.

But this morning, from Sault Ste Marie to Sudbury, somewhere between the Lake Lauzon and the Algoma Mills township, I truly felt God's peace...it is as if the angels were the ones driving the car for me. It was fluid, smooth and flawless. For once, I felt truly under God's wings.

And on the eve of the 12th day of Christmas (driving), tomorrow I will be back in Toronto! Only 400 kms to go. Wishing you and yours in advance a Blessed, Happy and Healthy Christmas, and may Christ's light ever shine on your life and family!!!



## Chapter 43

### Surrendering the Sword

When I contemplate what is the biggest take away from my formative years in the Ateneo, it is this haunting image of that lonely man up on the hill enacting his total surrender to the Master.



*'I have knelt through the tired endless days, Forever offering my silver blade...'*

(upon his arrival on horseback, traversing the rugged terrain of Montserrat, suffering from the crippling blow of a cannonball, and genuflecting to surrender his sword and his existence before Our Lady and the Master).

Then, he quietly prayed:

*"Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. Whatever I have or hold, You have given me; I restore it all to You and surrender it wholly to be governed by Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace, and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more."*

To many an Atenean, Ignatius of Loyola rocks.

Born in affluence and of minor nobility in a Basque castle, Ignatius was educated and rich with ambition, enamoured by thoughts of chivalry and knighthood. At 17, he joined the army, strutted about "with his cape flying open to reveal his tight-fitting hose and boots; a sword and dagger at his waist." He was captivated by glamour, full of himself. "A fancy dresser, an expert dancer, a womanizer, sensitive to insult, and a rough punkish swordsman who used his privileged status to escape prosecution for violent crimes committed with his priest brother at carnival time." Young Ignatius exuded world-wise sophistication, confidence, and arrogance. He even fell under suspicion of heresy and was imprisoned and tried, but was found not guilty. Conceit, to add to the list.

To me, he was but a vain young man, humbled in his youthful vanity and earthly ambition by a single life-changing event. His Creator would have none of this hubris. A "gentle" swipe

ended all these for the proud young Basque. A cannonball during a battle in Pamplona (1521). A single event that stopped his normal routines, his frivolity. In short, he...was...humbled.

The leg injury that ensued allowed him time to reflect on his life and pay attention in a new way to the deeper desires of his heart and what he really wanted his life to be. And what followed was a spiritual conversion and a call to the religious life.

His Creator then resurrected and redeemed his soul in meekness, servility and a mission to be a man for others. In submission and surrender, he earned his salvation and redemption.

As a young Atenean then, and now at 65 and retired, this image of Ignatius offering his sword to the Almighty still inspires and reminds what this life is all about.

Then, I moved to UP-Diliman for college on the other end of Katipunan. And another stark image (the Oblation) greeted me. The message of Ignatius wasn't lost after all. It is about surrender to the Almighty and service to others.



At the foot of the statue reads these words from an Atenean:

*Where are the youth who will consecrate their golden hours, their illusions and their enthusiasm to the welfare of their native land? Where are the youth who will generously pour out their blood to wash away so much shame, so much crime, so much abomination? Pure and spotless must the victim be that the sacrifice may be acceptable. Where are you, Oh youth, who will embody in yourselves the vigor of life that has left our veins, the purity of ideas that has contaminated in our brains, the fire of enthusiasm that has been quenched in our hearts? We await, Oh youth, come, for we await you!*

- Dr. José P. Rizal (*El Filibusterismo*)

And again, surrendering to his final fate, from "Mi Ultimo Adios" (Last Farewell):

*"In barricades embattled; fighting with delirium,  
others donate you their lives without doubts, without gloom,  
The site doesn't matter; cypress, laurel, or lily;  
gibbet or open field, combat or cruel martyrdom,  
are equal if demanded by country and home."*

Both men, Ignatius and Pepe, had a parallel message to me and the youth.

“Go forth and set the world on fire”

Often heard in many commencement speeches, to the dispassionate and superficial, this means to be very successful and attract a lot of attention. But not quite.

The name “Ignatius” means to ignite. Perhaps that was why Ignatius often ended his letters to Jesuits going to the missions with the expression *ite, inflammate omnia* — “go, set the world on fire.” According to writer Jim Manney, fire destroys; the world is already on fire with hatred, resentment, greed, lust, and other passions that consume individuals and whole societies. But fire purifies too; in the Bible, flames burn up the weeds and the refiner’s fire purifies gold. Then there are the tongues of fire that descend on the Apostles at Pentecost, bringing the power of the Holy Spirit. He says, this image might have been in Ignatius’s mind when he told his Jesuits to set the world on fire. He wanted everyone to be set afire with passion and zeal for the Kingdom of God.

To Pepe Rizal, perhaps being fiery is to have a strong (principled) personality, something related to heat as embodied in his impassioned writings, which led to his death by firing squad.

What both men could have meant is to light “*a fire that kindles other fires.*” That’s the kind of fire that’s worth spreading.

I sincerely hope this book and the stories contained herein would spark that fire within each of us and those who read our book.

And may I end this piece with a humble prayer of prostration and surrender:

*Lift my soul, oh Lord, that I/we may climb, that I may climb, that I may climb back to Thee – as I help my/our brethren.*

*Send forth Thy Light, that I may be shone, that I may be shone, that I may be shone – whilst I serve others for Thy Greater Glory.*

*In Thy divine loving presence, I humbly prostrate and seek to dwell, for I am Thine, for I am Thine, for I am solely Thine.*

*And Thy soft gentle voice in my heart, I hear, I heed.*

*For in Thy sacred sanctum, I found Thy Peace, I felt Thy Peace...and I rest in Peace.*

*Shekinah.*

## Chapter 44

### Peter – Called First and Called Still

By Jess Curabo

Simon was a fisherman. That was his life. That was all he knew to make a living.

But one day, Simon met Jesus.

Jesus called him to “Come, follow me...” And Simon, brother of Andrew, followed.

On the day that Simon decided to follow Jesus, his whole life changed. His plans changed. His priorities changed. Even his heart started to change.

But it took a while for his character to change. He didn’t stop being the brusque, impulsive man that he was. That would take time.

What did the Lord Jesus see in Simon?

Jesus saw “Petros” – the leader who would be bold in spreading the Message - that God’s love is for everyone – even for those who falter and fail. Jesus saw a man who declared that He was indeed the Messiah – “Blessed are you, Simon, Bar Jonah... and I also say to you, that you are Peter...” (Matthew 16:17-18)

Jesus knew that Simon Peter would fail – miserably and shamefully. But He chose him just the same. Peter’s denial of Jesus dealt a deadly blow to his pride. But Jesus restored him and said the very same words that He had first spoken, “Follow me.” (John 21:19)

Peter had gone back to fishing – the only occupation he knew. But Jesus came to him again. Jesus called him still. From catching fish, he was now supposed to not just fish for men but to feed and tend and care for the lambs and the sheep.

Peter was to learn that while he had failed, it was not the end. And now, he finally understood that he should not fail to follow the One who had called him. From fisherman to shepherd, from coward to champion. He would now start tending and caring for people – who, like sheep, are very timid creatures, who all too often get lost – because of their poor sense of direction and of judgment.

He would faithfully follow the example of the Good Shepherd - who left the 99 to look for the one sheep who was lost – the shepherd who loved the disobedient one just as much as the obedient 99.

And Peter truly understood because he was one who got lost himself. Yet Jesus came looking for him – to call him back – to affirm and establish his calling.

Jesus knew that Peter truly loved Him. And this time, Peter would not fail. The day would come that Peter would willingly and bravely give his life for His Master. And so it is for those of us who

have been called and who have chosen to follow Jesus. We are called to a life of obedience – to take up our own cross daily – and to come and follow HIM.



## Part 4

### *Art and Music*



## Chapter 45

### ***The Artist***

#### **Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino** by Brenda Villanueva Fajardo

Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino is an adaptation of the European tarot cards which are divining cards used in fortune telling and an old card game called “panginggi” during the nineteenth (19<sup>th</sup>) century.

This card set named “Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino” was inspired by a set given to the artist by her sister Mary Joan V. Fajardo upon the return from a Bayanihan World Tour in the 1980s.

The artist indigenized the cards giving The Original images local clothes, brown sari, black hair, but the postures remain the same.

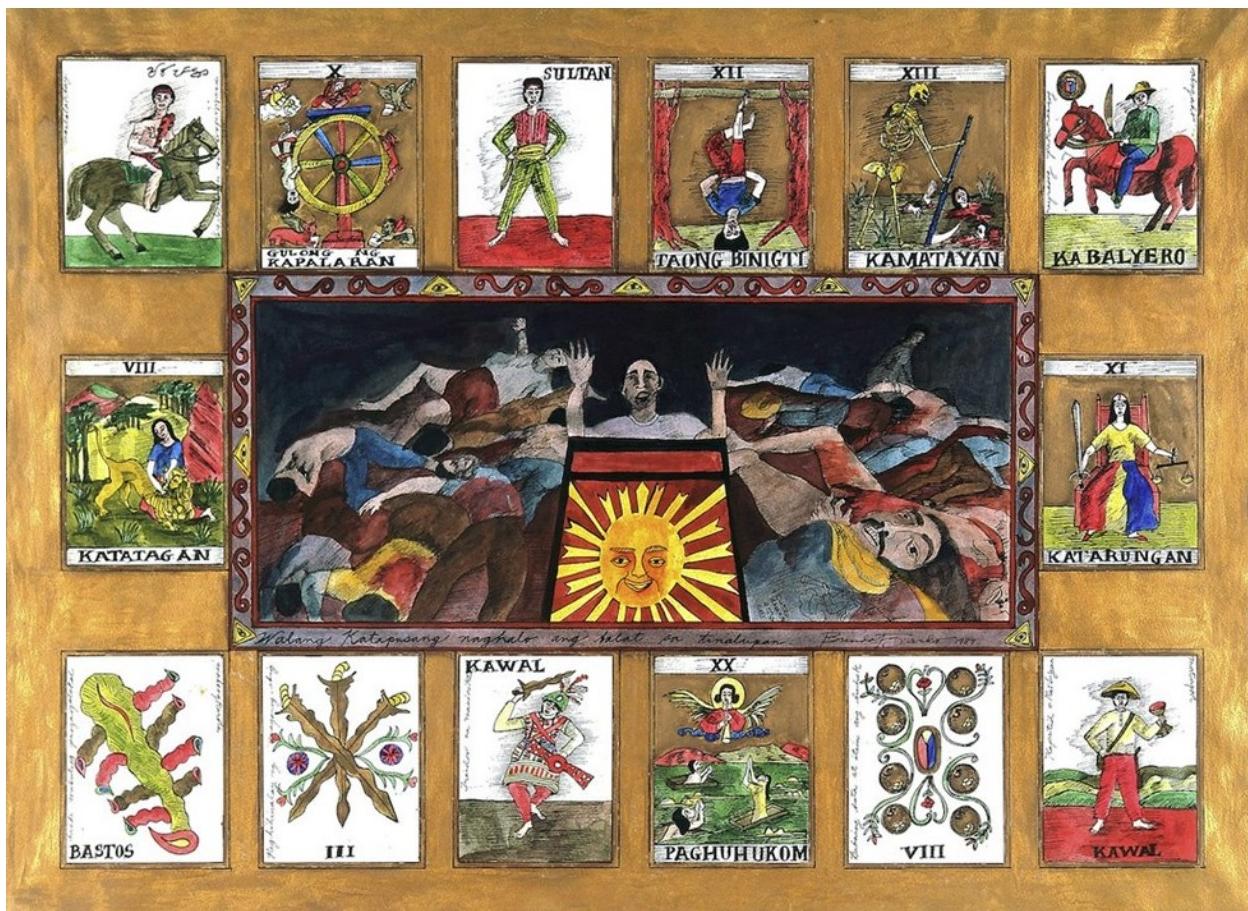
Since the adaptation, the cards have been used in the pictorial compositions. The tarot cards surround a central space which contains images from history or socio-cultural events.

The set is composed of the major arcana of twenty-one (21) cards, and the minor arcana of 14 cards each. The Cup (Copa), Coins (Barya), Sticks (Patpat) and Swords (Kris), totalling fifty-six (56) cards. In all, the set has seventy-nine (79) cards plus the title cards. It is an honor and privilege to present The Philippine adaptation of the Medieval European tarot cards: Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino.

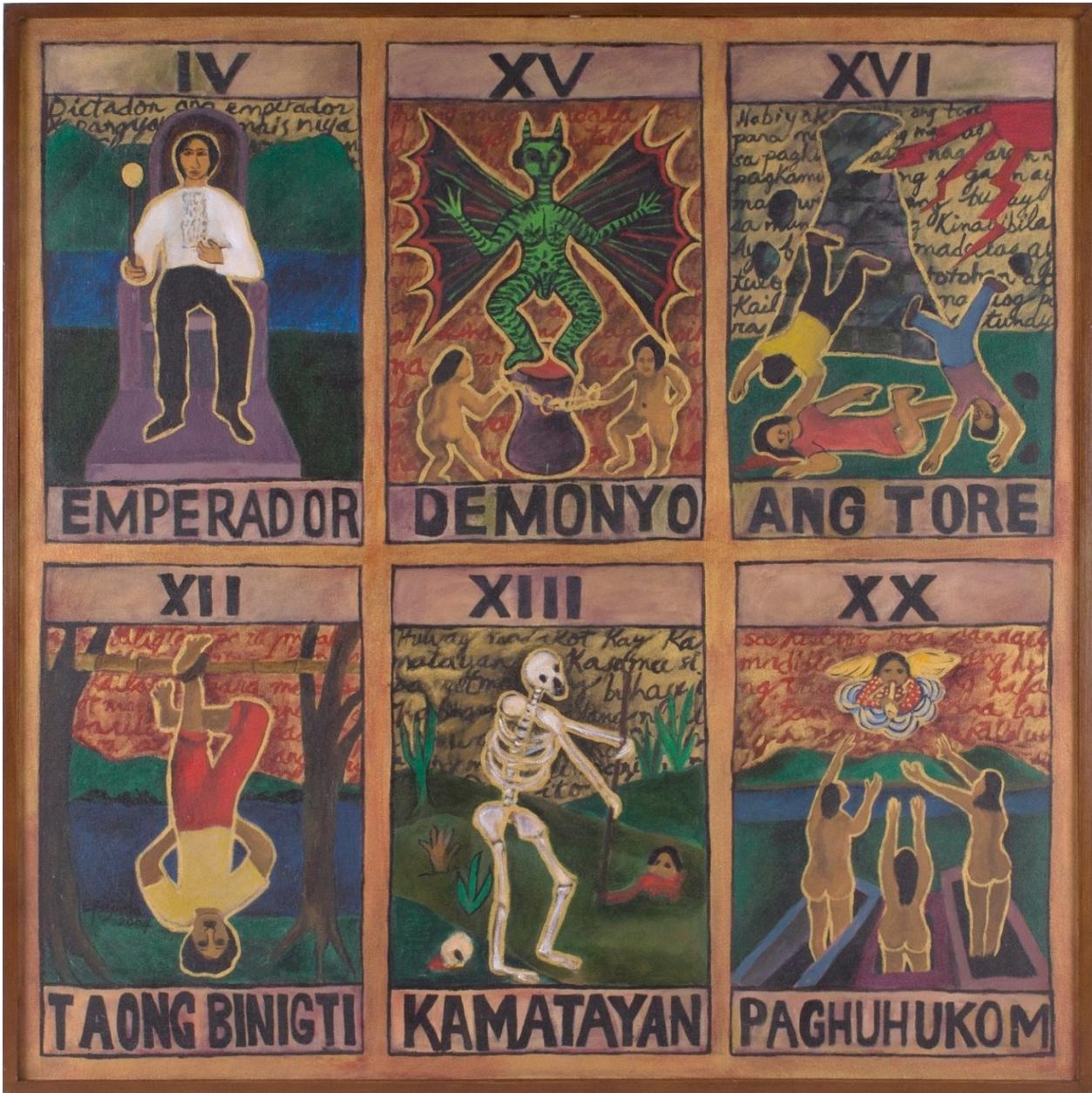


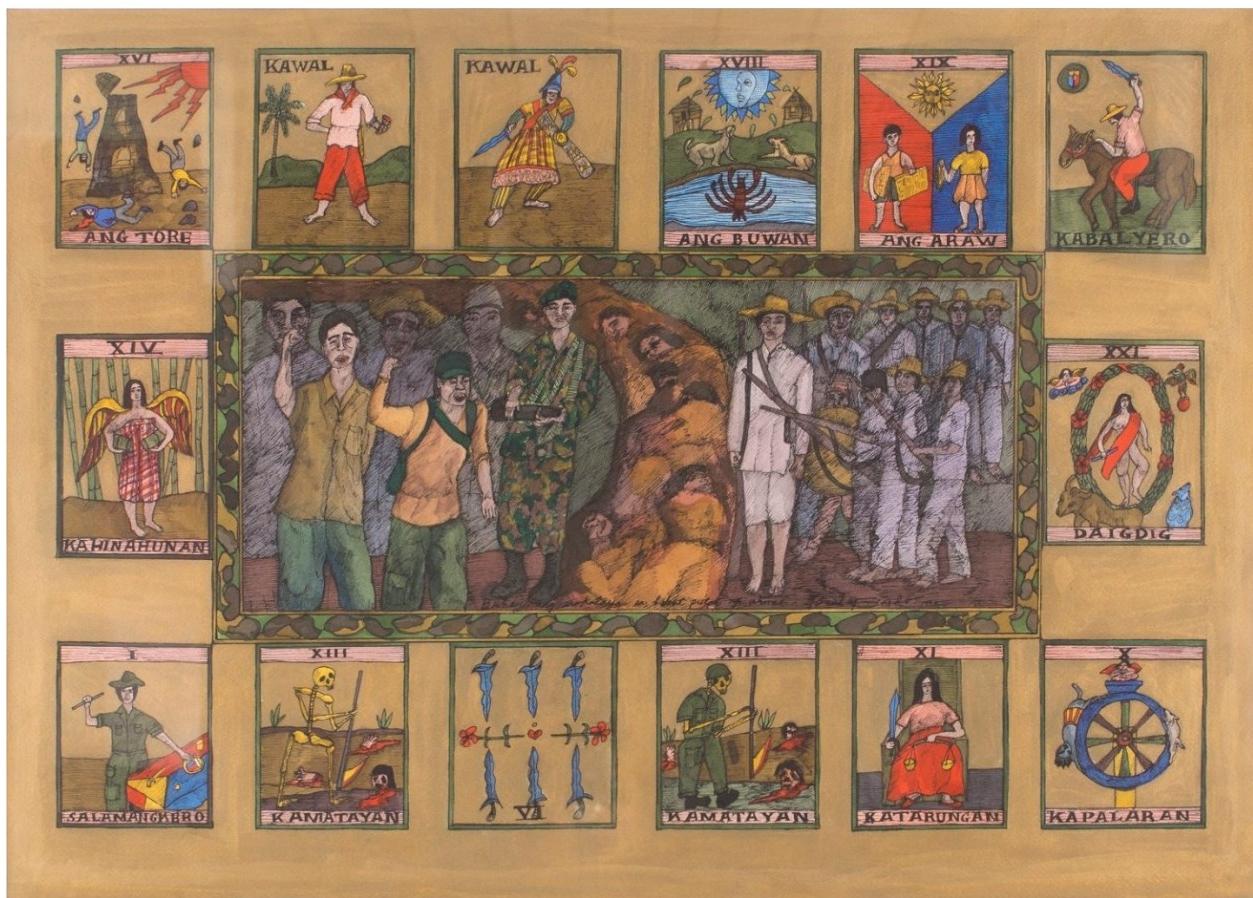














BRENDA VILLANUEVA FAJARDO



- Brenda Fajardo: The artist as scholar, educator and cultural worker
- 2013 Gawad CCP para sa Sining
- began her career in the visual arts as a printmaker and graphic artist before moving on to painting. Most of her works carry strong historical and nationalist themes as well as depict folk and mythological tales. She is best known for her use of tarot-card motifs in her works.
- She has held several solo exhibitions, locally and internationally. Her 'Babaylan' and 'Babaylay' (Playing Cards of Filipino Life and Culture) were notable exhibitions. She has also joined group shows in the country and in international exhibitions.

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- She has also joined group shows in the country and in international exhibitions.

Philippine painter and graphic artist, stage designer, and teacher, Brenda Fajardo was born in Manila on 18 February 1940. She is the daughter of Valeriano F. Fajardo and Libertad Villanueva, folk dance scholar. Her sister Mary Joan, is a dancer and choreographer. She holds a degree in agriculture from the University of the Philippines (UP) Los Baños, 1959, and a master

of arts degree in art education from the University of Wisconsin in Madison and Stevens Point (1967); and locally at the Ateneo de Manila University and the College of the Holy Spirit. She once served as chairperson of the UP Humanities department now the Department of Art Studies.

Her artistic and academic interests involve the aesthetics of poverty and the art of the people. She is known for her series of tarot cards, which she configures and situates in Philippine history and society. Her works have been much exhibited, especially in Singapore, Cuba, Brisbane and Paris. Together with Imelda Cajipe-Endaya and three others artists, she created the Kasibulan collective. She is also the founder of the Baglan Community Cultural Initiatives and was one of the pioneers of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), which saw the light of day in the late 1960s. As a member of the Philippine Art Educators Association, she is also an adviser to the National Committee on Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

Fajardo had her first solo exhibition of paintings in 1974 at the Kalinangan ng Lahi Gallery in Quezon City, and several exhibitions at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) from 1981 to 1989. Notable are her exhibitions entitled Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino (Playing Cards of Filipino Life), 1990, at the UP Visayas, and Buhay Pilipino, 1994, her special exhibit for Le Rond Pointe in Paris, which was premiered at the CCP. She has also joined group shows held mostly at the CCP. She was a participating artist in international exhibitions, such as those in Cuba and Brisbane, Australia. Since 1983 she has engaged in graphic design.

She has also worked in theater mostly for productions of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA): as set designer for May-i, May-i, 1979, Galileo Galilei, 1980 and 1981, and Pilipinas Circa 1907, 1982. She acted in plays such as Mother Courage, 1985, and Mga Ama, Mga Anak (Father and Sons), 1977. She has directed Mapait sa Bao (Bitter Coco), 1980, June Bride, 1986, and Damas de Noche (Women of the Night), 1991. She has conducted theater workshops all over the country.

Brenda Fajardo has won awards in the Annual Graphics Art Competition of the Printmakers Association of the Philippines (PAP), in 1968; honorable mention, Landscape, 1970; first prize, Feeling and Form Series 3-11 and third prize for Bukas Ngunit Tikom (open But Close) both in 1975. She was a Thirteen Artists awardee of the CCP in 1992.

Source: M.L. Maniquis, CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art Vol. IV, Philippine Visual Art, pp. 342-343.

## Chapter 46

### The Orchestra Conductor

by Jun Latonio

The most prestigious and yet misunderstood role in the orchestra must be that of the conductor. This mysterious person, with their back to the audience, hands waving in the air, casts a spell on the musicians and - on a good night - creates an intoxicating alchemy for the ears.

There's a historical stereotype that exists of the conductor: white, male, tyrannical. A good number of the famous conductors of the early 20th Century fell into this mould. NZ Conductor Marc Taddei says of Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini "he was a tyrant. The irony is that he was famous for taking a stand against fascists, but professionally, he was a dictator."

"His tongue was vitriolic as he subjected the musicians to withering abuse that was often downright insulting. 'Pigs,' he would shriek at the top of his voice, 'you are all pigs!'... When his temper would be spent, he would apologize for his harsh words and actions. 'You see,' he once explained, 'God tells me how the music should sound - and sometimes you come in the way.'"

Says female conductor of the New Zealand Symphony, Bridget Douglas: "Conducting is much more collaborative now. The best conductors, they really know what they want in terms of the shape and development of a piece, and they have very much their own style, but they trust the musicians to do their job too."

The Orchestra is an amazing collection of instruments that are made to play as one. The conductor and his/her constituents do not just deal with wood, brasses and strings - they communicate with the ensemble, they deal with people so that their performance is as close to the original intentions and narrative of many and varied composers.

The conductor drives the bus and navigates the twist and turns, the soft and loud, the largo and the presto, accentuates the main theme and melodies that constantly shift in klangfarbenmelodie and are played by different instruments. His/her mission is to make sure his passengers arrive safely and auspiciously at the appointed time...exhilarated in the manner the composer intended for the bivouac to be.

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*"Beautifully written, I couldn't help but put a spiritual parallel to this, with God being the conductor over all." (Pinky Villarana Evangelista)*

*"Maestro Jun, you have a special talent for making words sound like musical notes and weave them into a musical time and a written story." (JG José)*

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Chapter 47

***At saka mga musikero...***

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Pa6oOjnQE1vOJ6Q?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wqHKbhIQQ3inJaGhnPa6oOjnQE1vOJ6Q?usp=sharing)

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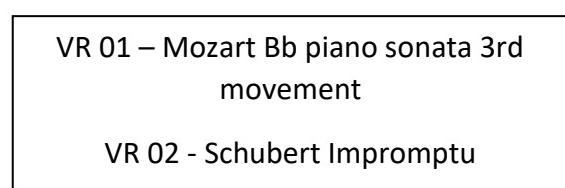


## **Val Mayuga, Ang Guitarista**



- VM 01 – Jolanta
- VM 02 – The Clap
- VM 03 – Classical Gas
- VM 04 – Romance Anonyme

## **Victor Revilla, Ang Pianista**



## **Sonny José, Ang Compositor**



- SJ 01 – Waiting for Her
- SJ 02 – An Octave Above the Clouds
- SJ 03 – The Dance of the Soul
- SJ 04 – A Song for Patricia
- SJ 05 – Cruisin' while Bikin'

## **Epilogue**

### ***Psalm 112***

*Praise the LORD! Yes, give praise, O servants of the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD now and forever. Everywhere – from east to west – praise the name of the LORD. For the LORD is high above the nations; his glory is higher than the heavens. Who can be compared with the LORD our God, who is enthroned on high? He stoops to look down on heaven and on earth. He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, even the princes of his own people. He gives the childless woman a family, making her a happy mother. Alleluia.*

*...In the end, as we fade away, we realise the real hallmark of 4-C rested on the four "C's" we picked up along the way, namely: **Camaraderie, Charity, Compassion, and a life centered in Christ...***



**Press Play**



**Press Pause**

Once the game begins, who knows when it will stop?